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SELIM



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SELIM, THE NASÁKCHI,

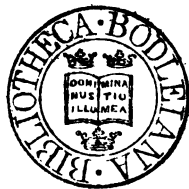
A PERSIAN TALE,

In Verse.

BY

CHARLES HETHERINGTON.

AUTHOR OF "THE EVERGREEN OAK," ETC.



PUBLISHED BY G. PHILLIPSON,
KINGSTON-ON-THAMES.
AND
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TO
R. D. HARRIS, Esq.

DEAR HARRIS,

“The Evergreen Oak,” and my few other rhymes, having been not altogether unfavourably glanced at by critics,—and by one perhaps too favourably—I again offer to friends, “A tale in verse.” The idea of the story arose from an incident in a novel, which I read many years since.

I once heard you remark, that you disliked referring to notes whilst perusing a poem, as it interrupts the ardour of attention. I determined to prevent such annoyance, but, by so doing, I fear that I have avoided the hillocks of interruption, only to wander, too often, along the wearisome plains of prolixity.

Yours faithfully,

THE AUTHOR.

Hampton Court,

14th January, 1867.

SELIM, THE NASA'KCHI.

CANTO I.

I.

O'ER Shiraz—city of the fairest vale,
Where Persia's southern mountains check the gale—
Hung the bright moon:—on silent mosques and towers,
On fertile gardens and their lattic'd bowers,
On many a gilded dome and minaret,
The queen of night, her soft'ning smile, had set.
Some hours had pass'd since, floated through the air,
The deep-voiced muezzin's call to evening prayer.
Ceas'd, had the busy tumult of the streets,
The trader's traffic and the juggler's feats,
The jester's story to a laughing throng,
The crier's voice and vagrant minstrel's song ;

The sound of camels' bells, of vex'd guitars,
And ceas'd the buzz of crowded, rich bazaars :
The squares were silent, city portals clos'd,
And all, it seemed, save night-police, reposed.

II.

Now, had the gentle god of sleep, around
Abdulla's house, his poppy fetters wound.
Doubtless the visions of th' old merchant show'd
Some caravan, long look'd for, on the road.
Its camels bearing Ispahan's brocades,
Bokhara's skins, and Georgia's captive maids.
If, of the last he thought, 'twas well for him
His spouse Zippora knew not of his dream.
To her, her slumbers, costly dresses, brought,
Of Cashan's silk in novel pattern wrought ;
Or splendid shawl, a present from Cashmere :
Or carpet from the Eeliaut mountaineer.

Such fair illusions, fancy seldom waves
O'er the brief, heavy sleep of wearied slaves.
Within the harem's most secluded room,
Dreamless as tenants of the darksome tomb,
Zippora's, tir'd, reposed ; and all, except
One lowly Kurdish girl, profoundly slept.

III.

This wakeful one, young Lella, whisp'ring, spoke,
"Sittara ! Maidee ! Amine !" — none awoke.

By the moon's light, which dimly shone between
The wood-carv'd flowerets of the window's screen,
She mark'd the three, as statues, motionless;—
Gently she rose, and tied her loosen'd dress.
Wrapt in a dark grey cloak, veil o'er her head,
With footfall noiseless as a phantom's tread,
She left the room—along the gallery crept—
Unbarr'd the outer door, and forth she stepp'd:
Softly she clos'd it,—listen'd,—look'd around;
Free was the court from startling sight, or sound;
Yet, of some casual eye above, afraid,
She mov'd within the lofty wall's safe shade:
She reach'd its gate—withdrew the bolt, and stood
In the large garden's lovely quietude.

IV.

A fairer night had never gemm'd the heaven;
Nor, tranquil beauty to this garden, given.
And yet,—though every flower that loves the sun
Had clos'd its petals when his race was done,
And gorgeous butterfly and singing bee
No longer flutter'd round them joyously;
Though not a wind-sprite us'd its gentlest power
To ruffle ev'n th' acacia's pensile flower,
Or wave the cypresses, which, here and there,
Solemn and dark, watch'd o'er the gay parterre—
This garden slumber'd not: it rather seem'd,
So fresh and brilliantly the moonlight beam'd,

Awake, but list'ning to the warbled tale
Of the young rose-enamour'd nightingale ;
Now wildly gladsome, now in plaints of love,
In varied cadence, from a poplar grove.
Enchanting bird ! the rose, perhaps, may hear
A rival lay from many a garden near ;
But sorrow not—she ne'er will turn from thee,
Whilst thou cast charm her with such melody !

V.

With *most* effulgence were the moonbeams shed
Full on an aged plane-tree's stately head :
And on a summer-house,—a fairy bower
Of gilded trellis twin'd with shrub and flower,
Built on a rocky mound ;—its pinnacle,
Glitt'ring with gold, on which the bright beams fell,
Mirror'd within a tank's clear water play'd,
Where lilies slept beneath the plane-tree's shade.

But Leila scarcely heard the warbler's lay,
Nor mark'd the beauty of the silvery ray.
Still fearful lest some sleepless one, whose bed,
For coolness, on a neighbouring roof was spread,
Perhaps might see her, on she glided fast—
Between the trees where shade was thickly cast ;
Nor paus'd until, from dangerous eyes, secure,
She freely breath'd within the rock-bas'd bower.

VI.

What spell allur'd the timid slave to dare
This midnight visit—not her first one there ?
To risk detection's sure result, the whip,
The slipper's blow upon her quiv'ring lip ;
Or, were the anger of her mistress high,
The bastinado's stroke of agony ?
Look in the bower !—no rare, though potent charm—
The maiden leans upon young Selim's arm.

Had she, an astrologic dervise met,
And of him bought a wondrous amulet—
As girls are wont—to bring some handsome youth
To be her lover, her's would prove its truth.
His form, attractive to a maiden's eye,
Tall, slender, firm, and moving gracefully,
In soldier's garb of purple silk is dress'd,
With crimson skull-cap, and the gold-lac'd vest.
His orange girdle-shawl—from whose full fold
A dagger shines, and pistols wrought with gold—
Is wound around him with peculiar care,
And from his waist depends a scimitar.
And now is soft—as Leila's happy sighs—
The usual lustre of his eagle eyes.
His curv'd mustachoes, chin's thick oval fringe
Need not the aid of kohol's jetty tinge ;
Nor the dark hanging curl that, rich and sleek,
Behind each ear adorns the sunburnt cheek ;—

Those curls, the only ones allow'd to grace
The ever-capp'd and shaven headed race ;
Except the crown-tuft, left for Gabriel's hand
To lift the faithful to celestial land.

VII.

And who is he that, trusting fate will keep
Abdulla's household firmly chained in sleep,
Dares, at the risk of limb, or life, if found,
Meet the fair slave—invade forbidden ground ?
'Mongst the Nasa'kchi's—the imperial band
Which waits at Persia's court the Shah's command,
Prompt with the bowstring and the flashing knife
To mutilate, or end the culprit's life ;
Prompt to enforce, by terrors of the sword,
The tardy tribute from some district's lord—
None looks more gallant of the martial group
Than Selim—sub-lieutenant of the troop.
And though familiar hath become his eye
With deeds of blood, and scenes of misery,
Yet—as o'er weeds, still pure a streamlet flows—
His heart, as ever, still with kindness glows.
Oft when the Shah, in progress through the lands,
From harrass'd hamlets tax of grain demands,
'Tis well for those which Selim visits—he
Wrings not the bribe from trembling poverty.
And when to some ill-fated palace sent,
Arm'd with the dread decree of banishment—

To maim its master, on whose head alights
Th' imperial ire, which, unresisted, smites ;
Or send him forth in indigence to roam,
And seize the beauteous daughters of his home ;
Far as he dares, he strikes with lenient hand ;
He curbs the rudeness of his reckless band ;
Checks the bold outrage, calms the frantic woe,
And softens, though averting not, the blow.

VIII.

'Tis three moons since—oh, morn by Leila bless'd !—
That love for Selim first disturb'd her breast.
Whilst homeward walking from the bath, and near
Some wand'ring minstrels whom she paused to hear,
A restive camel that had cast its load,
Rush'd wildly towards her up the narrow road :
She turned to flee—her foot confus'd, she fell,
When, while arose the crowd's despairing yell,
A youth sprang forward, snatch'd the helpless maid,
And well rewarded was his gallant aid.
Her veil had dropp'd—unnotic'd in her fright—
Oh ! what a houri face enchain'd his sight.
Not the rich flowers of those pomegranates—known
As “fruit of Paradise,” in Shiraz grown—
E'er glow'd more lovely in the summer rays,
Than Leila's cheek beneath the stranger's gaze.
Her modest blush suffus'd her neck, her brow,
Like sunset red on Shiraz' mountain snow ;

While gratitude, timidity, surprise,
Lit the dark beauty of her fawn-like eyes.
Brief was his glimpse of that enchanting face ;
For quick her veil resum'd its wonted place ;
And she withdrew her from his arm ; but yet,
Those silken tresses, black as polish'd jet ;
The pencill'd eye-brows, and the lids long lash ;
The eyes soft glance, like harmless lightning's flash ;
And the sweet accents of the thankful girl,
Through teeth that shame Bussora's purest pearl,
Were all remember'd—vividly impress'd,
Deep in the secret shrine of Selim's breast ;
And " Love "—as sings the bard Ferdusi—soon,
" Wore his heart slender as the young new moon."

IX.

And she!—when evening came, while scatt'ring showers,
Her wonted task—upon the garden's flowers,
So oft she spilt the water on her vest,
Her mistress deem'd her by some sprite possess'd.
Alas, poor maiden !—could the fault be hers,
That, while she bent her o'er the gay parterres,
Before her fancy Selim rose ; and sent
Her thoughts, thus rambling, to the morn's event.
" The noble youth !—how brave to rescue me !—
" Oh ! he is handsome as the date-palm tree !—
" What glowing cheeks—this tulip's brilliant dyes
" Are nought compar'd—and ah ! what lovely eyes !

“ The Shah’s best diamond, the “ sea of light,”
“ Can never shine so burningly ! so bright !—
“ Fate ! shall I e’er again behold him ? no ! ”—
Her bosom felt a gentle shade of woe—
“ No, he will soon forget me—wherefore not—
“ Me !—a poor slave !—ah ! wretched is my lot.”

X.

But fate had will’d, long ere that bosom sigh’d,
Its vague, soft wishes should be gratified.
Ev’n, as an Arab, who, when sinking day
Has left him dubious of the desert’s way,
Watches with anxious gazing, heav’nward cast,
For the kind star that guides him o’er the waste,
So, Selim round Abdulla’s house oft stole,
Watching for her—the love-star of his soul.
And chance was kind ;—they met,—the wish’d result,
A midnight interview, seem’d difficult,
And fraught with dangers ; love o’ercame them all,
For oft hath Selim scal’d the garden wall.

XI.

Oh ! for such meeting, this enamour’d pair
Would every peril, were it tenfold, dare.
Behold them ! leaning from an aperture
In the gilt trellis of the moonlit bower :
Her cheek reclining on her Selim’s breast,
And Selim’s arm around her slender waist.—

Happy is Leila ; mark the bliss which lies,
The quiet passion, in her downcast eyes :
Yet, is her heart—scarce conscious of its glow—
Calm as yon lilies in the tank below ;
Not that it sleeps like them—their idol gone,
Clos'd are the charms his western smile beam'd on :
But hers is with her, and her guileless heart
Open, awake, to all he may impart.

Ah, what a genial night to those who love !
Does Leila see the twinkling gems above ?
Smells she the jasmines which around her grow,
Hears she the nightingale's glad warbling ? no !—
All are exceeded ;—never yet stars shone
Like Selim's eyes, now bending o'er her own ;
No night-bird's song, how rich soe'er and clear,
Equall'd the voice low murmuring in her ear ;
Nor odorous jasmine bud the rose which now,
Touch'd by his lip, he places on her brow.

And fondly Selim gazes on her face,
Pure, pale in moonlight as the ivory vase
Which stands beside her ;—how his soul absorbs
The melting witchery of her large dark orbs.
But what excites them in yon starry sky,
Whither, till now, they've turn'd regardlessly ?
What sudden sadness shades their lovelit beam ?—
She sighs ;—her thoughts, he sees, are far from him :
He gently asks her, “ Leila ! why that sigh,
“ Why look'st thou at yon moon so earnestly ?

“ Fair is her face, but nothing, love ! to this ”—
The maiden’s blush’d beneath his fervid kiss.

She shook her head, and smiling pensively,
Thus answer’d, while she pointed to the sky.

XII.

“ The moon !—’tis yon three stars I look at—those !

“ Three in a line, just o’er the plane-tree’s boughs.

“ They e’er remind me of my childhood—home—

“ My native vale which freely I could roam—

“ My mother, father—one scene more than all—

“ When they were slain—I saw my mother fall—

“ And I made captive—I, to be a slave !

“ Child of a Kurdish chieftain, rich and brave !

“ ‘Tis eight years since, and I was young, but yet

“ That scene, O Selim ! I shall ne’er forget.

“ Oft have I talk’d to Amine of that night,

“ For she’s a Kurd, so I’m her favourite.

“ ’Twas such a night as this ; the moon rode high,

“ And on the mountains round beam’d brilliantly.

“ We Kurds, thou know’st, live not as thou ; we dwell

“ In caves and tents, within some mountain dell.—

“ So clear the moonlight on the valley shone,—

“ A lovely lone recess we call’d our own,—

“ That all within it, from our tent, which stood

“ At th’ upper end, distinctly could be view’d ;—

“ The sparkling rill which, serpent like and bright,

“ Wound down its bosom from a rocky height,

“ That rose behind us, towering, steep, and crown’d
“ With lofty pines and hanging thicket round ;
“ The little tents near ours, with curtains clos’d,
“ In which my father’s people then repos’d ;
“ Two horses grazing, near the water tied,
“ And quiet flock upon the valley’s side.

“ That day, my father, with his troop, had chas’d
“ The fleet wild-ass o’er miles of craggy waste.
“ It chanc’d his horse, which bore him like the wind,
“ Left all his men, save Hassan, far behind.
“ These two came home alone—alas ! ’twas fate
“ Beguil’d, detain’d the others till too late—
“ And both, with labour of the hunting, spent,
“ Lay lock’d in sleep within the silent tent.
“ No men, save them, were with us—yes, one guest—
“ A stranger—maim’d—whose wounds my mother dress’d—
“ Perhaps a captive—I forget—howe’er,
“ His arm was useless for the bow or spear.—
“ My mother’s slaves, their daily duties ceas’d,
“ Were all, except our nurse Shireen, at rest.

XIII.

“ Beside our tent there grew a sycamore,
“ A noble tree which shadow’d it half o’er.
“ ’Twas at its foot my mother sat—between
“ My little brother, me, and old Shireen.
“ Her infant calmly slumber’d on her arm,
“ And not one thought had we of lurking harm :

“ Who could presage it ! all around so still !—
“ Not the least sound except the gurgling rill.—
“ Well, there we sat—enjoying that cool hour,
“ And the sweet shadow of the sycamore.
“ My mother pleas'd us with some wondrous tale
“ Of the two steeds, before us in the vale :
“ And, when she ceas'd, the spangles of the sky
“ Engag'd our childish curiosity :
“ And oft we question'd her ; when, presently,
“ She pointed to yon stars—those very three—
“ While thus she spoke, ‘see, Leila, how they shine—
“ ‘ And I have three—my children ! ye, are mine—
“ ‘ May the great Allah smile upon your lots,
“ ‘ And make you beauteous as yon dazzling spots :
“ ‘ May ye united keep in love of heart,
“ ‘ Like to those happy stars which never part :
“ ‘ And, as your sires have done, live brave and free,
“ ‘ Among these mountains, far from slavery.’

XIV.

“ She look'd so serious, that I've ne'er forgot
“ The words she said, nor stars she bade me note.
“ Was it not strange, that death was hov'ring near,
“ Ev'n at the very moment of her prayer.
“ Scarce had it time to Allah's throne t'ascend,
“ When a slight rustling at the valley's end
“ Startled our ears—and, suddenly, I spied
“ Some distance upward on the mountain's side,

“ Amongst the brushwood, gleams of quiv’ring light—
“ See ! see ! I whisper’d, what are those so bright ?—
“ Ev’n, whilst I spoke, lo ! scimytar in hand,
“ Forth in the moonlight, stepp’d a well-armed band.
“ Their hostile look—the turbans which they wore,
“ Unlike our people’s caps—the arms they bore—
“ No hunters’ home-cry, always heard till then,—
“ Proved, at a glance, they wer’n’t my father’s men.

“ Up sprang my mother, crying, ‘ help ! awake !
“ ‘ The Turk’mans ! haste, oh haste for Allah’s sake ! ’—
“ And catching up my brother, while she press’d
“ The sleeping baby tightly to her breast,
“ Swift as an arrow darted round the tent,
“ And quickly scal’d the rocky hill’s ascent ;
“ While old Shireen, who dragg’d me by the arm,
“ As quickly follow’d, shrieking loud th’ alarm.

“ The steep was dangerous, yet, I scarce know how,
“ We soon were standing on its jutting brow.—
“ My mother’s countenance, the while she view’d
“ The vale below—her earnest attitude,
“ So motionless—her starting eyes, so bright—
“ Her face—her lips—so fix’d, and deadly white—
“ Struck me with terror, more than that fierce band,
“ And stamp’d upon my mem’ry hath remain’d.

XV.

“ To where she gaz’d intently, there look’d I :
“ Though all was tumult, and pass’d rapidly—

“ The women flying from their tents to hide,
“ Some here, some there, upon the mountain’s side—
“ I well remember, as a torrent’s gush,
“ I saw the Turk’mans up the valley rush ;
“ And while they came, I heard, a shot—a yell—
“ Our tent had fired—the foremost of them fell :
“ But on they speeded, with a deafening shout ;
“ And then my father, Hassan, both burst out,
“ And sprang like lions on th’ approaching foes ;
“ Then, all was strife, confusion, shouts and blows.
“ I saw my father’s flashing scimytar—
“ I saw a Turk’mán kill’d by Hassan’s spear ;—
“ But, more of that fierce fray, I cannot tell ;—
“ Doubtless the two, o’erpower’d, by numbers, fell ;—
“ For, at the moment, shriek’d Shireen—we turn’d—
“ Our refuge place, or flight, had been discern’d ;
“ By the white garb we wore perhaps betray’d,
“ Touch’d by the moon in spite the pine-tree’ shade—
“ Our path discover’d—and a Turk’mán, now,
“ Was stealing towards us o’er the shelving brow.
“ So near he’d come ’twas vain t’ attempt to flee ;
“ I saw Shireen kneel down imploringly :
“ Not so, my mother ;—glancing quickly round,
“ She gently laid her infant on the ground—
“ Bade me not move, but hold my brother still—
“ Tore up a stone half loosen’d by the rill—
“ And when the wretch, not thinking she’d resist,
“ Was almost close, she hurl’d it at his breast—

“ Then dash’d against him with her utmost might,
“ To push him, seem’d it, backwards down the height.
“ He stagger’d—struggled—saw the brink was near—
“ The unblest dastard drew his scimitar—
“ He struck her—yes—I saw him strike her twice—
“ Oh, may the wretch be shut from paradise!—
“ He flung her off—may fiends torment his soul!—
“ I saw her drop, and down the rough rock roll.

XVI.

“ Oh ! hadst thou heard her wild, terrific cry—
“ Methinks I hear it now !—so scar’d was I,
“ I knew not aught that next occur’d, until,
“ I found myself fast carried down the hill,
“ On the fierce Turk’man’s arm ;—and presently,
“ We reach’d his comrades waiting by a tree.
“ Their steeds were saddled ;—off we rode in haste—
“ Poor I was belted to the Turk’man’s waist.
“ All night we travell’d, till broad daylight—then,
“ Stopp’d at a cavern in a lonely glen.
“ There pass’d the day, and slept ; they made me bring,
“ To boil their rice, some water from a spring.
“ When shone the stars, again we journey’d on
“ Through the long night—but just when peep’d the sun,
“ We met and join’d a numerous caravan ;
“ And then they sold me to a kind old man.
“ He tried to cheer me, but my heart was sore :—
“ The Turk’mans left me, and return’d no more.

" What lands we pass'd through, or what distance came,
 " I cannot guess—it all appear'd a dream.
 " The various dresses of the companies—
 " The large and lonely caravansaries—
 " So many camels, and their merchandise,
 " Were all, to me, new objects of surprise.
 " When sixteen long, long nights had roll'd away,
 " We enter'd Shiraz ;—on th' ensuing day,
 " Zippora purchas'd me ;—what sum she gave,
 " She ne'er has told me ;—I became a slave !—
 " And shall remain one, ever, I'm afraid,
 " Till, in some city of the silent, laid."

XVII.

The maiden's story, told in pensive tone,
 Of life's sad change—her orphan state, so lone—
 Sank on his heart like mournful strains, and woke
 Its tend'rest pity,—fervently he spoke ;
 " A slave for ever—no ! by those dear eyes,
 " Whose beams I'd lose not for all paradise,
 " I'll hoard, and buy thee : trifling is my pay,
 " But stately Shiraz rose not in a day ;
 " And if I spend one besti needlessly,
 " May Cashan's scorpions sting me till I die.
 " I serve a monarch,—he remembers well
 " Against his foes my father fought, and fell.
 " The humblest flower expands to dignity,
 " Warm'd by the sunshine of th' imperial eye ;

" Khans spring from beggars,—see how oft the vine
 " Climbs to the turret,—Selim's star may shine.
 " Ah ! could my hand on Cyrus' treasure fall,
 " To free thee, make thee mine, I'd give it all :
 " Then thou should'st have whate'er thou might'st desire,
 " Slaves, jewels, music, and the best attire :—
 " But we'll be true, though poor ;—for me, I swear,
 " Long as yon sky shall hold a single star,
 " Long as yon heaven its bowers of happiness,
 " I'll love thee,—wilt thou not ? "

" O Selim ! yes ! "

She said no more, but in her timid kiss
 Came best assurance—and to him was bliss.

Anon they parted ; for the peeping day
 Warn'd the fond youth to tear himself away.
 And Leila, guarded by that deity
 To whom all nations bend the willing knee,
 Regain'd her chamber ;—all was quiet there—
 Sittara, Maidee, Amine caused no fear :
 Still were they chain'd in sleep, as when she rose,
 And Leila envied not their dull repose.

XVIII.

Cheerless had been the captive maiden's days ;
 As yet enliven'd by few sunny rays ;
 Now love began to gild them : many a woe—
 The harsh reproof, the double task, the blow—

Lost half its pain when vivid hope display'd
Her slavery ended, and her sorrows fled.
And many a tedious toil—embroidery,
Or picking rose-leaves from the musk-rose tree
For the fresh attar—much less irksome seem'd
When thoughts of Selim through her rev'rie beam'd ;
They were her music, cheering her along,
As to the camel is its driver's song.

Oft was the midnight, and the moonlit hour
Propitious to their meetings in the bower.
There,—while her Selim spoke of times to come,
When she would be the flower to grace his home ;
And for the blissful, long'd-for moment, sigh'd,
When she'd become, for ever, his ! his bride !—
Oh ! how the maiden's ear, enraptur'd hung
On the bright promise of his ardent tongue :
Her woes, captivity, her weary lot,
Ay ! all things, save her lover, were forgot.

C A N T O I I.

I.

Near Shiraz blooms a garden, wild, and fair :
Its name is his whose bones lie buried there—
The bones of Hafiz ;—his, whose various page
Is th' oracle of statesman, lover, sage.
The lofty cypresses, whose pleasant gloom
Enwraps the marble of his costly tomb,
O'er his remains—perhaps, in sympathy—
Mov'd by the winds, most musically sigh.

'Tis in this favourite spot of trees and flowers,
The youths of Shiraz pass their idle hours.
Scatter'd about in groups—on carpets, spread
In the cool shelter of a plane-tree's shade,
They quaff sherbet, with od'rous juices, mix'd,
Smoke through the tube in cooling water fix'd—
Converse—tell tales—at chess, backgammon, play—
Read, and recite, their poet's graceful lay—
And make libations at his hallow'd shrine,
With the fam'd produce of the Shiraz vine.
'Tis to this shrine that they, who fain would know
If fate will smile upon their purpose, go.

There, in the volume, whose engaging store,
Sprung from the bard's bright soul, and wondrous lore—
Kept by the dervise, guardian of the tomb—
They seek the omen which predicts their doom ;
With cover'd eyes, turn—counting back—seven leaves,
Then point the stanza which incites, or grieves.

II.

Now, from this garden, towards the city, comes,
With swell of trumpets and the beat of drums,
With gorgeous train, the world's effulgent star !
Gem of the universe ! the mighty Shah.

To view the monarch and his courtiers, waits,
A gazing concourse at the city's gates.
Amongst them is Zippora with her slaves ;
And well the pressure of the crowd she braves,
Till, by her sinuous movements, efforts strong,
She stands the foremost of the motley throng.
She deems not her exertions ill repaid,
The while she eyes the passing calvacade.
Hark to the music of the royal band,
The crash of drums, horns, trumpets, loud and grand.
Here come the carpet-spreaders ; that with fringe
Must be the Shah's—the red with purple tinge.
And here the pipe-preparers, bearing pipes
Like glitt'ring snakes, with green and silver stripes ;
Their opium boxes o'er their shoulders slung,
And brazen fire-pots from their stirrups hung.

And who are these, array'd in cloth of gold,
With jewell'd weapons, and deportment bold ?
They are the nobles,—mark each stately steed !—
The beasts of Fars ?—no—true Arabian breed.

But now Nasa'kchis, with their threat'ning loud,
And busy staves, repel the pressing crowd ;
For fast approach (fantastically clad,
In velvet deck'd with coins, in rich brocade,
And spangled silk of every gaudy hue)
The numerous running footmen—two, and two.
But these, Zippora scarce hath time to heed,
For lo !—conspicuous by his haughty steed,
His length of jetty beard, and jewels' blaze—
The king of kings delights her eager gaze.
Though his fine face, and figure's majesty,
His floating beard, and penetrating eye
Strike her attention, 'tis his rich attire
That sets her admiration's torch on fire.
His scarlet robe of silk is wrought all o'er,
With many a golden, and empurpled flower :
More costly pearls, than those which hang around
The Cashmere shawl about his high cap wound,
The boldest diver in the gulf's green waves,
Ne'er brought from out their sea-weed-cover'd caves.
A shawl, his girdle, forms ; from out its fold
Sparkles a dagger's hilt of gems and gold.

But who can tell the value of his vest !
 Golconda's treasures flash upon his breast ;
 And, as his beard floats out, such lustre shed,
 As the pink stars which wreath a Peri's head.

III.

Just when the merchant-lady's mind is cross'd,
 By computations of this vesture's cost,
 With sudden start and cry, the crowd recedes
 From the curvetting of the soldiers' steeds.
 In the confusion, some audacious wight,
 Seizing the moment of her servants' fright,
 Snatches the veil of one—it quits its place,
 And shows, O Allah, what a lovely face !—
 Towards the loud tumult, darts the Shah's keen glance ;
 It rests upon that blushing countenance ;
 While he exclaims, with smile of pleas'd surprise,
 “ Ha ! by my beard—the real moon face—stage eyes ! ”—
 Then, to an old attendant whisp'ring,—“ go !
 “ Find in what spot yon dainty rose doth grow—
 “ Purchase the Peri ”—

Quick, the guard address'd,
 Dismounts to execute his lord's behest ;
 Beckons Zippora—whom conjectures fill ;
 She quits the crowd to learn th' imperial will.

Meantime the Shah—to whose impetuous breast,
 Capricious love hath brought another guest—

While the loud drums and silver trumpets' blast
Proclaim the sunset and that hour's repast,
Enters the city—to his palace goes—
There, tidings meet him of rebellious foes.

IV.

A youth there was, amongst his cavalcade,
More mov'd than he, at sight of that fair maid.
One, whose young blood was fir'd with jealousy,
By the warm meaning of his master's eye.
Whose heart, divining that unheard command,
Stagger'd as though 'twere touch'd by death's cold hand.
He guess'd 'twas lightning which would soon destroy
The budding tree of many a hope and joy.

Ah ! wretched Selim :—'twas but yesternight,
That all thy thoughts were buoyant with delight.
That, while thy Leila on thy bosom lay,
Sighing, in love, the moonlit hours away,
Thou told'st her fortune had been kind to thee,
And that she soon should be, for ever, free.
Thou little thought'st, while glowingly thy tongue
Pictur'd the pleasures to be her's ere long,
How fast, was gath'ring near, the storm of fate,
To lay the promis'd scene all desolate.

V.

Now, while he walks, on guard, the palace court,
Scarce can his heart, its doubts, its fears, support.
Ages, the lagging minutes seem—at last,
The trumpet sounds—his hour of duty's past.

He quits the palace,—speeds along the streets,—
Glancing at every palanquin he meets.
Soon, at the ruins of a mosque, arrives,
Not many a pace from where Zippora lives.
He stops—conceals him in the ruin's shade ;
Thence can her dwelling's entrance be survey'd.
'Tis now, with all th' adjoining street, in sight ;
Clearly apparent by the moon's strong light.
He looks around him ; gone, the daily throng,
He marks the ling'ring few who lounge along ;
He darts his eyes' keen scrutiny afar,
But yet perceives no servants of the Shah.

And now, the few are hastening to their homes,
Warn'd by the night-police's signal drums.
Th' itinerant tobacconist, his waist
With fire-pot, pincers, pipes, and tray, embrac'd.—
The water-carrier, with his cup and sack,—
The dervise wild, with dark hair down his back,
His cone-shap'd cap, steel staff, and calabash,—
The fool with apes attir'd in tinsel trash,—
Leave the last echo of their weary feet,
And silence reigns throughout the moonlit street.

VI.

Still, not a soldier of the Shah appears :—
Ha ! did his fancy raise unfounded fears ?
Should it be so !—th' idea, like a star,
Beams through the vapour of his heart's despair.

He longs impatient for the wonted hour,
When he may venture to his Leila's bower ;
Though not their meeting-night, he yet will prove,
By leaving there a token-flower, his love.

But hark!—harsh voices from some dwelling near,
Mingling with female utterance, reach his ear ;
And tones of threat'ning, earnest, louder grow :—
Breathless he listens—come they from ? yet no,—
Again—great Allah ! all he fear'd is true—
'Twas from Zippora's court, that shrill adieu—
And Leila's voice—imploing ; ha ! she shrieks :
A deadly pallor flies o'er Selim's cheeks :
Fix'd are his starting eyes on yonder door,—
It moves—'tis open'd—every doubt is o'er.
Lo ! issues forth—he knows that form and gait—
Khobad, who rules the royal harem's state :
And, with the aged man, the dreaded group,
A litter guarded by th' imperial troop :
Onward it quickly goes—the street is cross'd—
In distant shadows, to his gaze 'tis lost.

VII.

Stunn'd, sick at heart, the wretched lover stands ;
His drooping visage buried in his hands ;
While, on the nightfall's gentle silence, break
The sobs of anguish which, his bosom, shake.
But, in a minute—rous'd instinctively,
By grief, fast surging like the wind-lashed sea,
Though without purpose—suddenly he starts,
With hurrying footsteps from the mosque departs ;

Pursues—perceives the litter—follows near—
Ev'n as a mourner would his lost-ones bier.
And lost she is to him ; to hope were vain ;
He knows, he feels, they cannot meet again :
As easy 'twere to pass heaven's portal bar,
As steal her from the harem of the Shah.

Onward the litter with its escort hies :
Now to the palace, brings its prison'd prize :
A moment, for the summon'd sentry waits—
The watchword's given—it passes through the gates,
While Selim, following, hears with agony,
The soldiers' jests on her just carried by.

VIII.

Along the plane-tree walk it now proceeds ;
Now the high harem wall, its course, impedes.
Forth from a door the harem slaves appear,
And to the court within, the litter bear.
But thither, hapless Selim follows not,
'Twere death to enter that forbidden spot.
Oh ! while the door is clos'd, how harshly jars,
Against his heart, its sound of bolt and bars !
Gazing upon it, with a vacant eye,
Mute, stupified, he stands : but presently,
His thoughts have pass'd it, and are now with her—
Her future state—beyond that barrier.
And soon his fancy paints her woe : he hears
Her sighs of anguish, and beholds her tears.

He sees her shrinking from the Shah's caress :
And sees the wretch's smile at her distress :
He burns,—confusion whirls within his brain,
Sudd'n as the storm-toss'd sands on Shiraz plain.
He rushes to his lonely chamber ; there,
Bursts forth the tumult of his wild despair.
As the just-captur'd tiger, in its cage,
Dashes the bars with unavailing rage,
He stamps the floor ; his flashing, bloodshot eyes,
The veins that knot-like on his forehead rise,
His parted lips, and teeth together press'd
Prove the fierce torture of that heaving breast.
With frantic air he paces to and fro,
Utt'ring, with voice, hoarse, hollow from its woe,
“ She's lost—she's lost—I cannot set her free—
“ Cursed be the day of her captivity !
“ Oh, we shall meet no more, no more, no more ! ”—
Madd'ning the thought !—he flings him on the floor—
There, with clasp'd hands, he kneels half choked with grief,
Till sobs and tears, how bitter ! bring relief.

IX.

Anon the phrensy of his woe abates ;
And thus on Leila's lot he meditates.
“ Time cures the keenest sorrow I have heard—
“ Oh, did they love as we who thus averr'd !
“ May it ere long some stream of comfort, o'er
“ The grief-worn desert of her bosom, pour ;

“ And raise some flower—of peace at least—instead
“ Of those destroy’d—for ever, ever dead.
“ May she soon bow to destiny ; and yet
“ Can she, the moments of our bliss, forget—
“ Our moonlit meetings ? ”—suddenly the thought
Of times when love his firmest links had wrought,—
When all they could be, each to each, they were—
Chills his whole frame with horrid fears for her.
Too well he knew that, were th’ ensuing day
To witness Leila on her bridal way,
If the reminding mirror (which is borne
Before a maiden on the marriage morn,
To view herself in virgin character
For the last time) were look’d upon by her,
Though many a modest blush that glass would show,
Amidst them would not be the vestal glow.

 This, the young lover thought not of till now:
This starts the dew of anguish on his brow :
A dreadful consequence his fancy paints ;
With sinking spirit, trembling, he laments.
“ Allah ! protect her ;—should the future prove
“ She is not worthy of th’ imperial love,
“ What will she suffer !—oh, her fault may bring
“ The fiercest anger of th’ infuriate king !—
“ Leila ! of this thou think’st not, doubtless—no,
“ Thou deem’st thou knowest all thy destined woe ;
“ Thou see’st, in thought thy wretched life to come,
“ The Shah’s loath’d fondness, and a friendless home ;

“ But little know’st, thy shame disclos’d, thou’lt die!—
“ A direful death would be its penalty,—
“ Shield her, great Allah !—from a doom so dread ”—

The sound of voices—feet in hurrying tread—
Of guards and servants, an increasing crowd,
Attract his ear : his name is call’d aloud.
He rises,—quick a calm demeanour wears,
And to the court, with heavy heart repairs.

X.

There does a scene unlook’d-for meet his eye,
Which, for awhile, averts his misery ;
And brings the thought-disturbing, rough relief
Which hurrying occupation gives to grief.
Around, all o’er, the spacious court is light :
Th’ embattled walls, above, with moonbeams bright ;
While numerous lanterns, carried to and fro,
And to the plane-trees hung, show all below.
The muster-drums are beaten, trumpets sound,
Arms are brought forth and pil’d upon the ground.
Slaves, sutlers, eunuchs, military troops,
Run hither—thither—stand in busy groups ;
Some cleansing muskets, sharp’ning scimitars,
And others fixing heads to shafts, for spears.
Some loading camels, mules, with arms and tents,
Provisions, clothes, and household implements ;
While off goes many a mounted messenger—
Sure signs are these portending sudden war.

And soon 'tis known, rebellion's meteor shines
In that wide province, rich in turquoise mines,
Khorasan—Persia's eastern land, which lies
Bord'ring the realms 'neath India's sultry skies.
There, restless Mahmood, lord of lands and town,
Flings off allegiance to the Persian crown:
Bribes to his aid some predatory hordes,
And bids defiance with his rebels' swords.
Once, he hath err'd ; been conquer'd, and forgiven ;
When next he mercy finds 'twill be—in heaven !
The king of kings, by subject millions fear'd,
Hath sworn by Allah and the prophet's beard !
To sweep—unpitying as the desert's sand—
The rebel dogs, for ever from the land ;
Soon shall they fall like fields of blazing straw,
And glut the jackal, and the vulture's maw.

XI.

Whilst, at the palace, arms th' imperial force,
Thus are Zippora's slaves in sage discourse.
“ Allah ! 'tis wondrous !—well, fate only knows
“ For whom the tulip of good fortune grows :
“ To day the diamond lies in earth, unknown,
“ And, lo ! to-morrow, decorates a throne.
“ Our Leila gone to live a lady !—sport,
“ In silks and jewels at a monarch's court !
“ Who could have dream'd it ev'n !—a Kurdish girl !
“ And not like me, a pure Circassian pearl !

“ What could have brought such luck? the fakir’s charm—
“ The silken amulet around her arm :
“ I saw her buy it, and I heard him tell,
“ He’d dipp’d it oft in Mecca’s holy well.”

XII.

Long do these prattlers marvel, all amaz’d ;
And much conjecturing has Leila rais’d ;
For when their lady—while they all stood by—
Inform’d her of her glorious destiny,
Her face display’d, instead of sudd’n delight,
A wild and helpless look, half doubt, half fright.
And when she saw no countenance express’d
The faintest glimmering of a lurking jest,
Pale as the dead she grew ; with suppliant knee
Sank on the floor, exclaiming breathlessly,
“ Oh ! save me mistress !—send me not away !
“ Leila will work her utmost every day ;
“ Oh ! for the love of Allah, keep thy slave !
“ Not to the palace—rather to my grave.”—
And, when arriv’d the palanquin, which bore
Their young companion from Abdulla’s door,
They star’d to see such grief, resistance wild,
From one, till then, e’er tractable, and mild.
Twice, from the servants of the Shah, she sprung,
And round her lady’s feet entreating clung ;
With frantic cries, besought a brief delay—
Oh ! would they give her but a week—a day.

They little knew the thoughts which throng'd her brain
Of Selim—heaven ! to see him ne'er again ;
Of means to meet him in the bower,—of flight,
She car'd not whither, on that very night ;
Ev'n to embrace him once,—to say, good bye,—
Then, by the drug or dagger, gladly die.
Ah no !—they deem'd th' imploring sad one's tears,
Nought but a foolish maiden's bashful fears :
And, as away th' imperial servants bore,
The struggling maiden, to return no more,
While rose her ceaseless shrieks (which loud and clear
Madden'd her lover list'ning, powerless, near)
Some pangs of envy through their bosoms shot :
They only wish'd that *theirs* had been such lot.

XIII.

But oh ! while onward towards the palace borne,
By what live terror was her bosom torn !
For might she not, that night, be made to bear
The odious wooing of th' enamour'd Shah.
And, when the litter reach'd the women's hall,
And forth she stepp'd 'mid gazers—strangers all—
Hearing the harem's chief directress say,
“ Prepare the bath, and bring some rich array ”
Panting she stood, with terror-wand'ring eye,
Scar'd like a wild fawn caught but recently ;
And shrinking from the matron's aiding arm,
Gasp'd forth in broken utterance her alarm.—

But then they told her of the sudd'n command,
For instant journeying to the turquoise land.
That, ere esteem'd a rose-bud fit to lie
In the sweet paradise of royalty,
The dance and minstrel's art, she'd have to learn ;
And months might pass before their lord's return.

This calm'd her fears; and turn'd aside from thought
An hour, she deem'd so near, with horror fraught.
Passive with grief, she let them change her dress ;
Nor heard their praises of her loveliness :
While all before her inattentive eye,
The scene around—to her, a novelty—
The lofty halls, the lamps of colour'd light ;
The gilded columns, roofs, the mirrors bright ;
The harem beauties chattering of the foe ;
The numerous eunuchs hurrying to and fro,
To get all ready by the morn's first beam,
To her was almost as a troublous dream :
One truth alone, stood forward, sad and clear,
That from her lover, she was torn for e'er.—
Poor girl !—th' impending evil which oppress'd,
With keen anxiety, her Selim's breast,
Came not to thought ;—'twas well ; enough for her,
To bear the loss of all on earth most dear.

CANTO III.

I.

Scarce hath the crescent moon retir'd from night,
And left the city to a dubious light;
Scarce are the muezzins to their turrets gone,
To chant the call to daybreak orison;
When Shiraz, startled, hears the drum's quick beat;
And troops of horsemen haste through every street.
Promiscuous cavalry arm'd cap-a-pie,
And camels bearing huge artillery;
And sumpter-mules, and all that swells the train
Of a large army, in a long campaign,
Pour quickly onward through the city gate
And on the plain, the Shah's arrival, wait.

"Twould seem, in Shiraz, few are left to sigh
For kindred absent—some, eternally—
So vast the throng, now gath'ring in array,
Preparing quickly for their destin'd way.
Great is the stir; the noises, loud and rude,
That break the early morning's quietude.

From numerous strings of mules and camels, rise
Their bells' soft jingling, and their drivers' cries;
Mingled with which, the hum of bustling throngs,
The clamorous work of twice ten thousand tongues,
And clang of harness, fill the welkin round,
With an incessant, torrent-murmuring sound.
While shouts of leaders, mustering, each his band,—
The trumpet's blast,—the loudly-given command,—
The piercing neigh, and rapid heavy tread
Of thousands of the fiery desert-bred—
Oft, from the din, with sudden outburst break,
Seeming the very firmament to wake.

But lo! the Shah!—surrounded by his guard—
Brave veterans they with faces rough and scarr'd—
And harem camels following in his train,
He joins his forces, ready on the plain.

II.

Th' auspicious moment of departure—nam'd
By sage astrologers—is now proclaim'd.
The march begins: the camp's unnumber'd throng
Files off in one vast line, compact and long.
Cool is the morn: o'erhead the sky is gray;
But yonder, see! th' appearing smile of day.
An orange hue, along th' horizon spread,
Steals softly upward,—now, a tinge of red,—
And lo! he comes! the glorious deity!
His brilliant glances light the laughing sky;

O'er the whole plain he darts his gilding rays,
And the long, moving multitude, displays.
Allah ! 'tis grand :—along the various groups,
From van to rear-guard of th' effulgent troops,
Arms, armour, harness, catch the orient beam,
And flash and sparkle like a sunlit stream.
Here, groves of spears seem tipp'd with purple fire;
There, silvery lustre gleams from chain attire.
The spike-topp'd casque with shoulder-guarding flap,
Glitters beside the shawl-girt scarlet cap.
Brightly as flowers, in many a gaudy row,
The soldiers' garbs, and horses' trappings glow ;
And gold-embroider'd vests boast every hue,
And caps and belts are crimson, yellow, blue.
Some, to their vestures add no coat of mail,
But deem that talismans will more avail :
While others, bless'd not with such holy zeal,
Trust less to talismans than temper'd steel.
But all, well furnish'd for the war, appear,
With pistols, musket, scimytar and spear,
And battle-axe upon the saddle bow—
Hapless the head on which descends its blow.

III.

The prime of Persian youths—behold them ! there—
Where Persia's standards greet the morning air.
Each lively, vigorous, as his agile steed,
Whose eyes are lightning, and the wind its speed.

Warm'd by the brilliant morn, and stirring scene,
Their youthful spirit leaps in every vein.
They laugh, they jest, they sing the martial lay,
Swear to be tigers on the battle day ;
Play with their prancing steeds, and scarce refrain
From dashing, madly joyous, o'er the plain:
Who, with such fiery souls, could fear defeat ?
Where is the foe they'd hesitate to meet ?
They burn to show their valour and their might ;
To wield their flashing scimitars in fight.
What, if in death they fall ? 'tis fate's decree—
Who can avoid the dart of destiny ?
'Tis but to leave the transient joys of earth—
Though sweet are they—for bowers of fadeless mirth:
'Tis but to leave fair mortal lips and eyes,
For lovelier ones of houris in yon skies;
Then by yon banner's "lion and the sun"
Allah protect us! let the foe come on!

IV.

Thus, gallant as their coursers, travel they:
Their limbs as active, and their hearts as gay.
But not so, all:—ah! not the stirring scene,
Th' inspiring freshness of the morning's sheen,
The general gladness, nor the song, nor jest,
Can lift the hand of grief from Selim's breast.
Avoiding converse—sad in thought, he rides:
Oft, a forc'd smile, or laugh, his anguish hides.

Torn is his heart, and not for *self* alone,
Not for the loss peculiarly its own;
'Tis Leila's dreaded and uncertain fate,
That sinks it with an ice-like chill and weight.
And yet, peeps forth, one glimm'ring ray that cheers
The gloomy prospect of his doubts and fears.
When almost half-way towards the turquoise land,
Th' imperial troops will leave the harem band;
And this, consign'd to trusty Khobad's care,
Will straight to distant Teh'ran's plain repair;
There, till its lord's return from war, will dwell,
Safe, in the guarded palace-citadel.
This is, at least, a respite from the hour,
When she must grace the tyrant's hateful bower.
Meantime, events—though Heaven alone knows what—
Some happy chance, may rise to change her lot.
The Shah is puissant, yet hath Mahmood might—
Oft dies the courser from the adder's bite.
War is uncertain: none can well foresee
What the next page of destiny may be:
Or ev'n, if pitying Allah show her grace,
That which he dreads may never come to pass.

Thus, does he meditate; while Hope, whose wings
Are ever prompt, at each idea springs:
And, while his fears for her he loves, grow less,
Again comes o'er his heart its tenderness.

V.

Oft while he rides, his eyes instinctive turn
To one vast troop, 'midst which, on camels borne,
And towering high o'er many a lance-form'd line,
The gilded litters of the harem shine.

One bears his Leila;—ah! 'tis grand for her,
Yet, to her love, alas! a sepulchre.
'Tis the gilt cage which, captive, holds that bird,
Whose song, by him, will never more be heard.
No more to press that gentle heart to his!
No more to feel those eyes' soft witcheries!
Oh! why did Fate, together bring them? why,
On every meeting look propitiously?
Let them, the verge of all they wish'd, attain,
Then stop them, part them, ne'er to meet again.

Poor Leila! there she goes;—ah! doubtless now
Of him she thinks,—for him her sad tears flow.
Allah! how evil, treacherous his star,
Thus to illume his path of love so far,
Then vanish——

Here are check'd his reveries:
From troop to troop a sudden mandate flies.
At faster pace the army must proceed,
For Mahmood's actions, quick prevention, need.
And, as the utmost efforts would be vain,
To haste the harem and its baggage train,
'Twill follow, guarded by a powerful force,
And leisurely, to Teh'ran, take its course.

A louder din, and livelier stir pervade
The gallant thousands of the cavalcade.
Th' advancing body, headed by the Shah,
Soon leaves the harem band behind it far.
And, while it winds beneath a ridge of rocks,
Shatter'd to shapes grotesque by nature's shocks,
And the last shining litter disappears,
Sad Selim spurs his steed to stop his rising tears.

VI.

Behold fair Leila!—in a palanquin,
Fit, in its splendour, for the Sheban queen.
Around her swell its cushions wrought with gold ;
Its rosy curtains check the sun, too bold.
Chang'd is her humble garb of yesterday ;
Soft yellow silk is now her rich array.
A sparkling emerald clasps her silver zone ;
Her armlets are Khorasan's azure stone.—
Observes she, feels she not her splendour?—no !—
Save on her cheek the hectic-looking glow,
By agitation sent—her spangled veil
Hangs o'er a face, as purest marble, pale ;
While from its tear-swoll'n lid, her fev'rish eye
Shines with a restless look, yet vacantly.

Oft has the sharer of her palanquin—
A harem matron of benignant mien—
Essay'd to cheer her gentle charge, in vain,
By conversation, thus, in playful strain.

“What! weeping, rose-bud!—thou should’st smile elate,
“At changing, for delight, thy menial state :
“Thou’rt come to bask beneath th’ imperial eye—
“No more, the moth, but brilliant butterfly ;
“Think of thy late companions! fancy, now,
“What envy burns them, and o’erclouds each brow.
“Thou rais’d a star to grace the heav’n! and they
“Left far below thee, merely things of clay :
“Ay! they would barefoot walk to Mecca’s shrine,
“To change the garb of lowly life for thine.”

In vain she strives to cheer the mournful maid,
By jest and converse of their cavalcade ;
To trace the fountain whence so many tears,
By questions of her home, and early years.
But, as she seems scarce heard, and all reply
Is a half sentence or convulsive sigh,
She tasks no more her tongue to give relief,
But lets her, leisurely, emerge from grief :
She knows the sorrows of the young subside,
Quickly as gushing streams, in smoothness glide.

VII.

Though Leila scarcely heeded aught she heard,
Once, by the matron, were her feelings stirr’d.
’Twas when she mention’d that the Shah was gone,
To head the troops, already hastening on :
And, pointing towards them, while they slowly wound,
Far on the plain, behind a rising ground,

Bade her peep forth, and take one farewell glance,
At the Shah's turban, and his twinkling lance.
Then, did she gaze; but, whilst she forward lean'd—
By the silk curtains of the litter screen'd—
The matron notic'd not, how heav'd her breast,
How keen the interest which that gaze express'd.
For Leila knew that, near th' imperial eye,
Attended the Nasákchis constantly;
And guess'd that Selim held his usual post,
By the dread leader of the warlike host.

Oh! while the army lessen'd from her sight—
Still passing on behind the craggy height—
What would she not have given for wings to fly,
If but to say farewell to him, and die:
If but to tell her fate,—to vow that nought
Should shake her love, or drive him from her thought.
And when the last troop vanish'd, leaving blank
The distant view, oh, how her spirit sank!
Gone was the vague, vain fancy—vain indeed!—
That by his aid, perhaps, she might be freed.
Then did she feel alone—of hope bereft;
Not ev'n the solace, to be near him, left:
Back on her cushion, silent she reclin'd,
While round her heart, these thoughts of sadness twin'd.

Ah! we shall meet no more,—go Selim! go—
Thou little fanciest half thy Leila's woe.
Ah no! unconscious that I'm far away,
Thy erring wishes back to Shiraz stray.

Thou think'st I still am there,—by this time know,
Thou'rt forc'd to leave me for the distant foe.
Thy fancy paints me 'neath the cypress tree,
Working my task, and sad at loss of thee;
Shunning my fellow slaves to hide my tears,
And ponder secretly my hopes, and fears.
Oh! would it were so;—ev'n the worst command,
The heaviest blows from harsh Zippora's hand,
All that I've e'er endur'd—compar'd with this,
This wretched life, and losing thee, were bliss:—
Angel of death, could'st thou, dread Azrael!—
Replace my kindred in their mountain dell,
And fate permit me thither, freed, to go,
Could I be bless'd without my Selim! no!—
When last I met him, oh! how glad were we,—
“ Joy, joy my love! thou'lt soon be mine ” said he.
Bright to our thoughts did future pleasures bloom—
Now, what a change! from light to ceaseless gloom!—
O Selim, Selim! my belov'd! ador'd!—
Shield him, great Prophet! from the foeman's sword:
Send him home safe,—and yet, for what? to meet
The thorns of sorrow rising at his feet.

From Teh'ran, soon as from his duties free,
He'll haste to Shiraz, and—he'll hope—to me.
He'll speed impatient at th' accustom'd hour,
To meet, as erst, his Leila in the bower:
Night after night he'll go, but all in vain,—
Leila will never meet him there again.—

Perhaps, from battle he'll bring wealth and fly
At once to ransom me from slavery.
He'll ask Zippora for me—then, oh, Heaven !
How will his heart, by her reply, be riven !—
He'll know I'm torn for ever from him—yes,
To bear another's fulsome, fond caress !—
Love of the Shah ! I sicken at the thought !
What would be life without thee Selim? nought !
Hear me! I will not live; no heart but thine,
Witness dread Allah ! shall be press'd to mine.
No, I will die—and we shall meet in heaven ;
There, to the brave their lov'd on earth are given.
Thou'lt ask to have me in those bowers above,
Where Fate can fling no shadow o'er our love.
No, I will die !—and yet, 'tis said, the Shah,
For weeks from Teh'ran may be absent far.
Could I but feign contentment in my state,—
Could I but cheat the eyes that round me wait,—
Chance might present, in some unlook'd for shape,
Ere his return, the means of an escape.
To Teh'ran's rocky mountains I would flee,—
A mountain life would not be hard to me;
There would I hide me in some lonely spot,
Till war be ended, and my flight forgot;
Then seek the city,—daily watch the street,—
Selim! my Selim! we again might meet;
Oh! dare I hope it !—will such joy be mine ?
Star of my destiny ! oh ! prove benign !

Wilt thou assist me?—if not, welcome death !—
A tank's deep waters soon can choke the breath,—
And if my flight be stopp'd,—I have no fears—
Better the bowstring than a life of tears.

VIII.

Thus does the Kurdish captive ruminate
On the sad present, and her future fate.
Now, having seen the dreaded Shah depart,
Fades the immediate horror of her heart;
And her new hope of flight,—as waters far,
Heard by the wayworn desert traveller—
Upholds her spirit :—still the dart of woe
Hath stupified her with its sudden blow.
Silent she sits within her palanquin,
And heeds not, knows not ev'n, the passing scene.
While round her are the voices of the throng,
And many a camel-driver's cheerful song,
Oft, to Abdulla's house, her fancy roves,
Still oftener follows all on earth she loves.
Scarce heard, unnotic'd, comes upon her ear,
Laughter and music from the litters near.
In these, the beauties of the harem bowers—
The new companions of her future hours—
Some with guitars and tambourines, and some
Tapping harmoniously the light small drum,
And sweetly warbling Sadi's graceful lay,
Amuse themselves upon the tedious way.

Oft have they ask'd, and much they long to know
Of the new comer, and her cause of woe :
And oft the matron with a sharp reply
Hath check'd their ill-tim'd curiosity.
When midst them placed,—while paus'd each panting beast,
And tents were pitch'd till noontide's heat had ceased—
Mute, drooping, sat she, as the just-cag'd bird,
And, from her lips, deep sighs alone were heard :
Nor did she once partake the proffer'd meal,
Which the kind matron urg'd with gentle zeal.

Thus has the first day of her journey pass'd :—
Behind yon mountain ridge the sun sinks fast :
Its crimson splendour fades along the sky,
Leaving her still absorb'd in misery.

CANTO IV.

I.

Now, many a day glides on: and many a night,
Whose orb affords the harem-travellers light.
They've seen, O fall'n Persepolis! its smiles
Show, at the mountain's base, thy ruin-piles:
Thy few yet-standing columns, vast and gray,
Lone witnesses of many a realm's decay!
Pale spectres of past glory!—which remain,
Viewing the heaps half buried in the plain.
On these—the massy portals wide and high,
The broken sculptures chisell'd dextrously,
The steps, the terraces, the crumbling walls,
The prostrate shafts, and shatter'd capitals,—
An antiquary's searching eye may gaze,
And guess the wondrous works of olden days.
From these, to fancy, far around may swell
Thy scenes of grandeur ere Darius fell:
Ere flam'd thy temples to the frantic brand,
Of the drunk Macedonian victor's hand:
Ere, by the Arabs, levell'd to the plain,
When Persia yielded to the Moslem chain.

Ages have laps'd since then : the city's site
Welcomes the bittern's, and the moor-fowl's flight.
The vagrant Eeliant—they whose flocks rove o'er
The Elburz mountains of the Caspian shore—
Find, for the steed and corn-store, fitting spot,
Within the rock-hewn tombs of kings forgot.
Perish'd has all that can uphold its fame,
Save a few, solemn fragments, and—a name !
Save the historian's oft-surmising page,
And the bright fables of the warbling sage.

Thy lyre, Ferdusi ! far has made it known,
In e'er enchanting verse, as "Jumsheed's throne:"
For who would heed that tale-reciter's tongue,
Which has not oft thy numbers said, or sung ?
And could not well the fav'rite theme relate,
Of the reverses of king Jumsheed's fate ?

II.

Scarce had the column-tops, with moonbeams white,
Wan'd from the passing harem party's sight,
Ere many a tale-teller began to tell
How the proud sovereign's glorious fortunes fell.
How fam'd his court—a paradise on earth—
For riches, splendour, slaves, and ceaseless mirth;
Till, from his throne by Syria's monarch torn,
He wander'd forth, an outcast sad and lorn.
With such light legends, or with Sadi's song,
Which jocund muleteers give loud and long,

The travellers cheat the weary leagues away,
Their hours of journey by fair night, or day.
When the bold sun's meridian fervour glows,
Th' encampment's form'd for some few hours' repose.
The sweet siesta, and the breaking fast,
Employ the time till noontide heat is past.
Sometimes, the tents exclude the burning beam,
Beside the fresh, too-seldom-met-with stream.
Sometimes, the hanging mountain-mass's shade
Gives a cool shelter to the cavalcade.
At others, halting on the arid plain,
Beyond the shadow of the mountain chain,
The sun-tir'd troops obtain a canopy,
'Neath a lone group of plane-trees dark and high.
And oft they pause, till help'd by morn to pass
Th' uncertain way across the deep morass,
Or lofty ridge, where moonlight cannot show
The narrow path, with dangerous steep below.

III.

Behold them!—climbing slow the mountain way:
Brightly the moonbeams on their spear-points play;
And on the gilded palanquins, which now,
Pass, in a line, along the mountain's brow.—
Oh! what a charm by yon fair orb is given
To the blue ether of the starry heaven!
What a wild beauty to this mountain-pass,
Of cliffs abrupt and many a hanging mass!—

See! where its silver lustre tips, and streaks,
The craggy slopes, the minaret-like peaks,
The rocks above—fantastically pil'd!—
The glens below—so shadowy, and wild!
While the dry torrent-bed, and shrubless vale
Of yellow sand, seem luminously pale.

Here—through the gloom of these gigantic blocks,
These fallen fragments of o'er-toppling rocks—
Oft hastes some caravan—a closing band,
With matchlocks prompt, and scimytars in hand.
The fearful merchant watches every shade,
Lest plund'ring Eeliauts spring from ambuscade,
Strike him to earth, and bear his slaves, his stores,
To marts of cities near the Caspian shores.

Now, little matters it if foes lurk near :
Not ev'n the harem beauties' bosoms fear.
Those ranks of lances—twinkling brilliantly,
Like stars descended from the cloudless sky—
That guard of many a Yezd and Shiraz man—
Not the faint hearts of Koom, and Ispahan,—
Present too formidable an array,
For the fierce band to dare obtain a prey ;
And the Shah's banners, floating high o'erhead,
Ev'n to the mountaineers give some slight dread.—
Safe, and at leisure, 'neath the moon's soft light,
The numerous train winds up the rugged height.
Listen! how sweetly mingling, float around—
Making night's stillness seem yet more profound—

The hum, the noise, of merry muleteers,
Of songs that please the quiet camel's ears ;
Of tongues in converse, and of jingling bells,
Which the swift mountain echo softly swells.
Hark ! a loud voice, o'er all, awakes the air ;
The sober muezzin calls to midnight prayer ;
He deems it fit, though far from holy tower,
To warn the faithful at the wonted hour ;
A hundred lips th' arousing cry repeat,
" There is no God but God, lo ! God is great ! "

IV.

Perhaps the charm of this rude scenery
Might tempt from sleep a pilgrim poet's eye.
Perhaps yon stars might lure a prescient sage
To ponder o'er his astrologic page :
But gentle harem ladies little care
To gaze on moonlit mountains wild and bare :
Would rather close their timid eyes—afraid
Lest sprites appear from every rock and shade.
Nor has yon heaven, with all its point of gold,
For them, the charm it might have had of old,
When Genii youths forsook their native skies
To feel the witchery of earthly eyes.—
Calmly as silkworms in their leafy bowers,
Or resting butterflies in wind-rock'd flowers,
They slumber in the moving palanquins ;
And dream, perhaps, of such celestial scenes.

V.

'Tis to the sorrowing, that the moonlit sky
And lonely mountains seem society.
Night suits the sad ; its mildness, and repose
Blend with the feelings of the gentler woes :
Its shadows, stillness, which the day denies,
With dark despair, and sterner miseries.
'Tis the lone mourner's confidant,—whose mien
Of solemn beauty, pensively serene,
Woos the lorn bosom to indulge its sigh,
Uncheck'd by mirth, unmock'd by levity.

'Tis such to Leila now :—unheard, unseen
By the tir'd sharer of her palanquin,
She broods o'er griefs of which she dares not speak,
While oft the big round tears roll down her cheek.
Those tears are bitter ; yet more welcome they,
Than the forc'd smile that gilds her face by day ;
Than the prompt laugh with which she, guardedly,
Veils her deep sorrow from the matron's eye.
Her thoughts can, undisturb'd, to Selim flow
And the fair past, to faithful memory, glow :
Their moonlight meetings—dangerous, yet how dear!—
His sanguine hopes that happier times were near ;
His looks, his voice, his vows they ne'er would part,
All, all arise, and sweetly feast her heart.
The present also, wand'ring fancy shows—
Her lover marching towards the distant foes.

She sees him riding—with a joyless brow,—
He thinks of Shiraz,—breathes her name, ev'n now;
She sees him silent, smoking in his tent—
Not mingling in his comrades' merriment:
Then does her reverie, many a scene, create,
Of the fierce conflict, and his dubious fate;
Till gradually, 'midst prayers for him, and sighs,
Kind sleep, in pity, seals her tearful eyes.

VI.

Now has the stupor, o'er her feelings, cast,
By the first tempest of her anguish, pass'd.
The faces round her, and the dazzling change
Of her condition, have become less strange.
Oft has she calmly mus'd upon her state,
And on the prospect of her future fate.
'Tis dark—uncertain: still, one glimm'ring light
Rouses her drooping heart—the hope of flight:
To this she looks: this gives her power to meet
Her new companions with a smile's deceit;
To hide the wounds of many a random jest,
Which strikes the cherish'd secret of her breast;
And seem as though her fears were half forgot;
And that she grows contented with her lot.
She lets the scene around—the cavalcade,
The landscape-view from mountain tops survey'd,
The dangerous path for camel, and for steed,
Wake her attention, and to converse lead.

Now seems the matron's bland solicitude
To win her to a less unsocial mood.
To her, a new-come harem girl's distress,
Forgotten soon in smiles and joyousness,
Is a mere frequent matter ; and she's glad
To see the fair one daily grow less sad.
Sometimes she asks her to relate the tale
Of her abduction from her father's vale :
And her late mistress, fellow slaves, and home,
Often, the subjects of discourse, become.
Then, never fails the matron to compare
Her present splendour with her years of care ;
And praise great Allah, who hath rais'd the flower
From the vile earth to grace the royal bower.
And when her cheeks betray a blush's tinge,
Or sudden tears start o'er the jetty fringe,
She thinks 'tis woe for friends she'll meet no more,
Zippora's slaves—and that 'twill soon be o'er.

VII.

Thus, with the hapless girl the time wears on ;
League follows league, and half her journey's done.—
Now brilliant morning rules th' ethereal arch,
And sunbeams light the harem party's march.
Slowly 'tis toiling down an arid steep,
Where the huge camel's foot sinks oft, and deep.
Now winds along a firmer, broader space,—
Now, on the plain, proceeds at faster pace.

Here heads peep out from many a palanquin,
For Khobad calls, "look forth, and view yon scene!
" 'Tis Ispahan! 'tis half the world! a gem!
" Brightest of jewels in earth's diadem!—
" Allah! what orchards bloom all o'er the plain—
" Ev'n to the mountains—far as sight can strain:
" What fruits of paradise! what flowers are there!
" The rose, the mulberry, the peach, the pear.
" Look! dwellings—myriads—scatter'd far and near,
" Dot the green gardens, and but just appear.
" Their yellow hue, in pleasing contrast, shows
" The emerald foliage that around them glows.
" Behold the city!—midst them—scarcely seen—
" Hid in refreshing groves, so cool! so green!—
" Dost thou not see, amongst those spreading trees—
" Those plane-tree alleys, and dark cypresses—
" The sun-touch'd summits of its loftier piles,
" Glitt'ring with golden balls, and lacquer'd tiles;
" And the gilt crescents of its mosques, and towers,
" Its domes, and minarets, and royal bowers?
" And there, its river—silver Zeinderood—
" Through verdant meadows winds its limpid flood:
" A noble bridge will lead us o'er the stream,—
" See how it sparkles in the sun's bright beam!
" Ay, by the Prophet's beard! what work of man
" Equals the wonder of vast Ispahan!"

VIII.

Such is the praise this scene of beauty wakes ;
 But nearer view'd the sudd'n enchantment breaks.
 Nature alone still blooms ; o'er most beside,
 Decay, and silence, hold dominion wide.
 O'er many a waste of ruin'd villages,
 And towns deserted, which, at distance, please,
 She spreads profusely her illusive screen
 Of leaves, and flowers, and various hues of green.
 Fair smiles the city to a stranger's eye—
 Ev'n as poor Leila does—externally.
 For years not honour'd as the chief resort,
 Of the "world's glory" and his glitt'ring court,
 Th' abandon'd palaces have minstrelsy
 Of the shrill winds, and chirping cricket's glee :
 The spider clothes th' enamell'd, pictur'd walls ;
 Through gilded lattices the wild weed crawls ;
 The verdant moss invests the bath, the tower ;
 And to the crescent climbs the flaunty flower ;
 The fountains fail to fling the cool supply ;
 And the once lily-deck'd canals are dry.

Not so, are all ; what home of royalty,
 "Palace of forty pillars" equals thee !—
 Thou seem'st some Peri's dwelling,—bid to rise
 From the calm water which before thee lies.
 For sure, from none but fairy labours, grew
 Those flowers of mirrors, gold, and many a hue,

Which round thy lion-bas'd, high columns, twine ;
And in thy vaulted halls serenely shine.
From floor to dome, thy marbled chambers glow,
With all that wealth, and skilful hands bestow ;
In fair devices, matchless wrought, display
Rich painting, carving, and enamel gay ;
And, all around, th' admirer's eye may trace,
Temp'ring the gorgeousness, an airy grace.
Thy gardens too, with that which pleasure loves—
The temples, plane-tree walks, the cypress groves,
Thesparkling fountains, flowers, and fruits, and streams,
Bloom unsurpass'd—the utmost fancy dreams.

IX.

Here, for a day, the harem beauties rest :
Enjoy the bath—of various treats, the best.
Stroll through the palace ; and, admiring, gaze
On Persia's boast, and every stranger's praise.
And oft they utter mighty Abbas' name,
Who rais'd this record of his peaceful fame.
Abbas the great ! th' illustrious Shah of Shahs !—
To him, the city owes its chief bazaars ;
Its finest plane-tree walks, and bridge, and fanes,
And loveliest gardens—themes for poets' strains.
But Abbas sleeps where soon must slumber all :
And war has strick'n his once proud capital :
It sank beneath the ruthless Afghan foe,
And ne'er has ris'n recover'd from the blow.

Though commerce brings, from far, the caravan
To the rich merchants of fam'd Ispahan ;
And though are prostrate when the muezzin calls,
More forms, by thousands, than in Shiraz' walls ;
Still, grass-grown squares, bazaars, and lonely streets,
Give to the fox, and jackal, safe retreats.
And oft in these is little seen or heard,
Save a stray camel, or a warbling bird ;
Save the gown'd scribe, or priest with foot sedate,
Who seems as though he mourns the city's fate.

X.

Again have sunbeams, and the lunar ray,
Seen the proceeding travellers on their way.
Seen them along the plain and passes, wind,
Till Ispahan is many a league behind.—
And lovely Kohrood's village maids awoke,
When morning o'er their fertile valley broke,
And watch'd the gallant troops—bnt seldom seen—
Till trees conceal'd the last high palanquin.

Now, Cashan's streets, the cavalcade, receive ;
And tents are pitch'd, for here 'twill halt till eve ;
And steeds, and camels gladly rest awhile,
And the poor mule is lighten'd of its pile.
The harem ladies taste—refreshing fare !—
Its noted fruits, the fig, the melon, pear,
The richest grapes on which the sun e'er beam'd,
Pomegranates too of flavour far esteem'd.

But ah! from Leila, Cashan wakes the sigh;
And, back to Shiraz, sends her memory.
Oft has she help'd to ope its new-come store,
Which old Abdulla rang'd around the floor;
And often, with her fellow-slaves, has made,
Zippora's garments with its fam'd brocade.

XI.

Again the travellers wend, with leisure pace,
O'er leagues along a rocky range's base.
Far on the west its barren heaps arise;
Eastward, Khorasan's vast salt-desert lies.
A weary way is this, by day, or night:
But lo!—yon glitt'ring turrets cheer the sight.
They enter now thy holy city, Koom!
Which needs no labours of the plough, nor loom.
By numerous hands its wealth is humbly given,
By pious pilgrims brought, as gifts to heaven.
For many a sainted mosque—some, fall'n, forgot—
Has mark'd it—ages past—a sacred spot.
And, ere the travellers, after evening's fall,
Have, far behind them, left its ancient wall,
Some passing pilgrim cries, "I seek the tomb,
"Of Fatima th' immaculate, at Koom!"—

XII.

Onward, across the desert lone and dry,
Whose far, far boundary is the bright blue sky,

Whose sunburnt sparkling salt appears as though
'Twere waves of foam, or drifts of mountain snow—
The travellers march : and, after many an hour
Of toil o'er sands which give no verdant bower,
Gladly the harem ladies hear the cry,
“ 'Tis pass'd ! 'tis pass'd ! and halt we presently.”

But when beneath the peaceful stars, again,
Up through the mountain-pass proceeds the train,
Their hearts are beating, and their tongues are rife,
With wondrous tales of dreadful sights, and strife.
Not that banditti bold awake their fears—
Thanks to the sabres round them, and the spears !—
Nor the steep path, uncertain, narrow, bare,
Which needs the mule's and camel's utmost care :
But, Allah ! 'mongst these dark, tremendous rocks,
What demons shriek ! what spirits fly in flocks !
Not one will peer from out her palanquin,
Lest she behold some monster, red, or green.

And 'tis no marvel that this gloomy path
Of rock distorted by an earthquake's wrath,
This “ valley of the angel of grim death ”
Quickens the superstitious traveller's breath.
But now, from out these heaps of hillocks riven—
Which to the fiends, by legends wild, are given—
No demons start :—perhaps the troops' gay songs,
Laughter and noise which echo loud prolongs,
Have power o'er spirits whilst the cheerful sound
Drives awful silence from the rocks around.

At length this savage, dark defile is pass'd ;
And morning beams are o'er the travellers cast :
And smiles are on the harem-beauties' cheeks ;
Their fears have ceas'd, and many a one thus speaks.
" Oh ! what a tedious journey ours hath been !
" I long to leave this narrow palanquin !
" Allah be prais'd ! we soon shall reach our home,—
" Pleas'd shall I be to see the palace dome."

Scarce has the wish been said, when gladsome cheers
Announce that Tehran's loftiest tower appears.
Far is it seen across the sterile plain,
Shelter'd below the Elburz mountain-chain.—
Now seems the cavalcade, from van to rear,
Camel, and steed, to know that rest is near :
For briskly, towards the city on they march,
Though sunbeams burn from 'mid the azure arch.

But not within the city's royal towers,
'Till winter reign are plac'd the harem flowers.
'Tis to a pleasant summer palace near—
Where sudd'nly smile the rose and streamlet clear—
Close on the mountain's foot, amidst cool air,
That now th' imperial palanquins repair.—
Gladly, 'tis enter'd by the harem guard ;
And pleas'd the guarded hear its gates unbarr'd.
They long to idle in its fresh'ning baths :
They long to gambol in its shady paths :
Each, all, rejoice—save Leila :—oh ! to her,
'Tis the dread cell that waits its prisoner.

Darkly her heart forebodes.—The massive wall—
Lofty and thick to brave the cannon's ball—
The brazen portals of the spacious court,
And trusty troops that guard this rock-bas'd fort,
Meet, for a moment, her quick, anxious sight,
And sternly bid her think no more of flight.
And now, while passing up the court's broad walk,
Whilst her companions round her gaily talk,
By force she checks her bosom's wretched sigh,
And mutely breathes with saddest energy,
“ Selim! farewell—oh, here must be my tomb!
“ Death, by the drug or stream, thy Leila's doom!”

C A N T O V.

I.

Now lapse the summer days : and now, in bowers,
Where the cool jet descends in sparkling showers,
Where through the lace-like dome soft light falls o'er
The silken couches, and the marble floor,
The harem fair ones mostly pass the day,
And guard their beauty from the solar ray.
There glide the hours : no slave-like toil is theirs,
But light amusements seem their only cares.
One feeds her golden fishes—lets the leap
Of the gay fountain lull her half to sleep.
Another tends, and decks with silver net,
The long smooth tresses of her purring pet.
And there another, with new speech, improves
Her gorgeous parrot brought from India's groves.
And some on girdles, fans, or slippers, try
Their bright inventions with embroidery :
Or, by the mirror's aid, attempt to place
Their gems and turbans with a new-found grace.
And many warble lays of love, and suit,
Each to her gentle voice, the tinkling lute :

Or sing a chorus, whilst in measure come
 The mellow beatings of the playful drum.
 They toss the ball too, and, with laughter, fling—
 Higher and higher yet—the gamesome swing.

And favourite pastime 'tis, in groups to lie—
 Where falls the fountain not too noisily—
 And each, in turn, repeat her mem'ry's store
 Of poems, jests, and legendary lore.
 Sometimes the tale is of those demons dread,
 That dwell on Demawund's vast, snow-capp'd head ;
 And round the mountain howl and dance at night,
 And, chang'd to griffins, with good angels fight.
 Sometimes of handsome youths borne off in sleep,
 By genii hags, to sea-wash'd caverns deep ;
 There teas'd, in vain, to love, till round the sea
 Their guardian spirits search and set them free.
 And oft they've lik'd the Kurdish girl to tell,
 How she was stolen from her father's dell ;
 And how at first she felt, and what she thought,
 When for a slave by old Abdulla bought.

II.

But sure, of late, some witch, whose work is harm,
 On the young Kurd hath wrought a baleful charm.
 When they pursue, at eve's refreshing hours,
 Their various sports amongst the garden's bowers—
 Chasing each other through its green arcades,
 Gay as gazelles in bless'd Arabia's glades—

She shuns the game ; and in some spot o'ergrown
With screening foliage sits aloof—alone.
Oft while they lounge beside the bath, she seems,
Though loud the talk around her, lost in dreams :
And seldom speaks, unless in brief reply,
And then her quiet voice sounds mournfully.
Her cheek too waxes pale ; though none could show,
When first they saw its bloom, a richer glow :
Her eye is sad too ; and she oft appears,
When she replies, to keep down rising tears :
And with a languid step she moves, as though
Her feet were wand'ring in a house of woe :—
Yes ! the young Kurdish girl must be unwell,
Or under influence of an evil spell.

III.

Ah ! little think they that the smiles which came
On Leila's face, when first she join'd their game,
Were but as flowers that, climbing, gaily wreath
The perish'd palm, and hide decay beneath.
Unhappy girl !—not easier 'twere for thee,
To quit the royal harem's boundary,
Than for the sinful—whom the Koran warns—
To cross that fearful bridge beset with thorns,
Sharp as a sabre, narrow as a hair,
O'er which the faithful shall to heaven repair.
Too well the servants of thy royal lord—
Slaves of his will from faith, or hop'd reward—

Keep ceaseless vigil o'er his aviary,
To let one bird, beyond its limits fly.
Too oft they've seen how quickly heads lie low,
How fierce the rack, and prompt the sabre's blow,
To dare relax one moment's cautious care,
Or list to murmurs of a captive fair.
Not greater heed at Mecca's shrine is given,
To guard the oft-kiss'd stone that fell from heaven,
Than to the harem by its matron band,
And trusty eunuchs, arm'd and e'er at hand.
And seldom comes—and never sure—one hour,
When Khobad may not, from his lofty tower,
O'erlook the gardens and the fountain-court,
Where the fair subjects of his trust disport.

IV.

All this she knows : for thirty times, the sun,
Since here she's been, his daily round hath run ;
And she has seen the harem's usual state ;
And on her hopes had time to meditate.

Oft, while amongst her frolic friends at play,
Roving the gardens at the cool of day,
Or weaving flower-chains with them 'neath a tree,
And list'ning to some songstress' melody,
Her anxious eye has furtively glanc'd o'er
Each lofty wall, and firmly fasten'd door.
And though she view'd them oft, and oft again,
'Twas but to feel th' attempt to pass were vain ;

And though she durst not ask, nor speak of aught
That might betray her secret, constant thought,
Yet oft they've told her, guards are pacing round,
And spies observe them in this sacred ground.
And well she knows, were open'd every gate,
And slept the soldiers that beside them wait,
No night, how dark soever, no disguise
Could cheat a wary eunuch's jealous eyes.

V.

Thus she perceives her hope of flight is gone :
Often she thinks of death—and yet lives on.
Not that she fears to die ; death fades to nought,
When the Shah's passion is her hideous thought.
But—as to mock the eye weak leaflets spring
From the bare plane-tree fell'd, and withering,
So, though her hope is prostrate, yet will start
Some faint, fair fancy to beguile her heart.
Might not the Shah be slain—his harem sold—
And she, perhaps, be bought by Selim's gold.
Might not the bands of Mahmood come by night !—
And fire the palace—put the guards to flight !—
Then, while confusion reigns, and gates are free,
Allah assist her ! she would strive to flee ;
Or, till the foe were gone, would hidden lie,
Then to the neighb'ring hills, unnotic'd, hie.
This thought too oft she dwells on,—if the Shah
Return in triumph from the rebel's war,

From the high tower which far o'erlooks the plain,
His harem girls will view the warrior train,
And she may see, once more, her lover!—oh!
That bliss alone were worth a world of woe!
Yes, she will see him once before she die,
Then in the fountain end her misery.

VI.

Such are the self-delusions—vain as fair—
Which oft flash o'er th' ill-fated girl's despair.
Yet, as the hope t'escape, which oft has fed
The wish and power to veil her grief, is dead,
Chang'd is her recent lively air and mien,
And, undisguis'd, her discontent is seen.
She now when question'd why so oft in tears,
Owns 'tis the royal favour which she fears;
Owns it with eyes whose gleams of wildness prove
How her soul sickens at the thought of love!
Still, save when ask'd, she never speaks her grief;
No voice is near with sympathy's relief.
Some see with envy her superior charms;
Some jest at what they deem her false alarms;
And others bid her learn, as they, to bear—
The chains that bind *them*, surely she can wear.
Too well the harem captives know, unless
Bestow'd—as marks of royal graciousness—
Wives to the courtier lords, their lives will be
Pass'd, though in splendour, still, in slavery.

And some there are of those young revellers,
Whose tears have fall'n as fast, perhaps, as hers.
Yes ; to the Georgian, or Circassian fair—
Whose pure Caucasian form of beauty rare
Made her the merchant's prize—at times will come
Thoughts of her childhood, friends, and distant home ;
Thoughts of a youth who'd breath'd th' impassion'd vow,
Which mem'ry shakes her bosom with, ev'n now.

VII.

But though the gay, and those who have endur'd,
Deride the sorrows of th' unhappy Kurd,
The matron's duty is to check her sighs,
And banish sadness from her beauteous eyes.
To tinge her thoughts with hues of cheerfulness,
By pastimes, feasts, and gifts of gorgeous dress ;
And to excite her emulous desire
To please the Shah—not tempt his fearful ire.

And now she's taught the dancer's skill, which shows
Th' alluring grace, in motion, or repose :
And on the light guitar she learns to play ;
And with its chords to blend sweet Hafiz' lay.
For wisely did Zippora tell—t' enhance
Her worth, and price—how well the girl could dance :
And that her songs, th' imperial soul, would thrill,
Ay ! as if sung by th' angel Israfil.

But vainly tries the matron—and may try—
To soothe, or rouse her from despondency.

The sports, the gifts, the feasts, the rich attire,
The fearful threat'nings of the royal ire,
Alike have fail'd—are pow'rless all—t' impart
Delight, or fear to that unchanging heart.

See her when bid to dance ;—how blithely sound
The bells of silver to her anklets bound !
How lightly moves she ! with what graceful air !
Then watch her face, and mark the misery there.
Mark the bright spot that paints her pallid cheek—
Mark the wild eyes that, mental anguish, speak.
Watch when she plays, how oft her thoughts are far
From the gay music of her guilt guitar :
And though her voice might well the soul enchain,
'Tis much too mournful for her sprightly strain.

VIII.

Ah ! had she never lov'd—had passion's beams
Touch'd not her youthful bosom, save in dreams,—
Or were she one whose faith could ill withstand
The flatt'ring favours of a royal hand,
Haply she might not weep ; but feel that fate
Had nobly rais'd her from her lowly state.

But no !—for not the few forbidden fires—
The magian worship of her ancient sires—
Are kept more holy in their secret fanes,
Than the pure, love-lit flame, her heart contains.
Torn from her home, her young affections found
No spot to bloom in, nought to cling around ;

And long they slumber'd in that lonely breast,
Till sudd'nly came fair love, its first, bright guest ;
Came like the streamlet to the desert's sand,
And made her feelings' richest flowers expand.

To him—th' ador'd—that love entire was given,
Unshar'd by kindred—those fond ties were riven,—
And in her heart 'twas fix'd—there firmly stays,
The sole, bright object of her constant gaze :
Stands like a single palm 'mid plains all bare,
More guarded, prized, that *only* it is there,
And nought can come within that sacred spot,
To move its firmness, make its charm forgot :
And the Shah's passion—oh ! that would not be
A mere brief blight to stain its purity,
But the simoom, before whose scorching breath,
'Twould writhe in madness, till reliev'd by death.

IX.

Now time rolls on :—the harem fair complain
That through the palace dulness holds her reign.
Wanting its royal lord, they say it seems,
Stupid as founts when stopp'd the dancing streams ;
And, if return not soon, his voice—which calls
New feasts and pleasures to its drowsy halls—
Surely they'll pine, like nightingales that sigh
When the lov'd roses which they sang to, die.
How they exist, the prophet best may know ;
No banquets, fireworks, not one puppet-show ;

Not ev'n a juggler—since th' imperial sword
Went forth to strike Khorasan's rebel horde—
Hath cross'd his legs within these sombre walls,
To swallow fire, and toss the spears and balls ;
Not ev'n a jester been, who seldom fails
To raise their laughter with his witty tales ;
Nor a young troop of harmless tumbling-boys ;
Well, life is useless thus depriv'd of joys !

And Khobad too, (who—though his keen, lynx eye
Hovers around them much too frequently—
Is oft the guide and umpire of their sport,
And brings them chit-chat from beyond the court,)
Ev'n he grows humdrum as his basking cat,
And sits amongst them more to doze than chat ;
And smokes his caleoon, whilst he ought t' amuse
With the bazaar's and city-crier's news.
What though he tells them, in a sapient speech,
That Galen saith, diversions cheat the leech,
Have not the gardens been their daily range,
Till ev'n a desert were a welcome change ?
And who, so oft, the same old songs can sing ?
Play the same games, and use th' eternal swing ?
Oh, they shall die of dulness!—there are they,
Languid as tent-flags on a breezeless day.
Nor spring among them, ev'n the transient winds
Of a light pique to stir their hearts, or minds.
Nothing occurs,—no birth of fawn, nor bird,
Nor has a slave, of late, the lash incurr'd :

But all seems wrapp'd in vapid lethargy,
As a lull'd vessel on the Indian sea.

X.

And yet, what now? what tale, or tumbling troop
Collects in yonder grove a hastening group?
The Georgian Rose imparts some strange event
That fills her comrades with astonishment.
See, while they list, what gestures of surprise!
And yet no sounds of joy nor laughter rise,
But eager whispers: see too, whilst she speaks,
How her eyes sparkle, and how flush'd her cheeks!
This is no tale of mirth;—they now exclaim,
“Nay by the Prophet, tell'st thou truth? oh shame!
“Thou canst not mean it? she, the Kurdish girl?
“She who appears the guileless, spotless pearl!
“Ill-fated wretch!—well, well, fate wills it thus—
“She'll never rise the favourite star o'er us:
“Well might the matrons storm, and seem in fright;
“Khobad said little, but his face was white;
“They fear the tempest of the Shah's fierce ire:
“Will she be scourged? or will the knife, or fire
“Deface her beauty? or more dreadful yet,
“Perhaps they'll hurl her from a minaret:
“Poor girl! oh, that were too—too terrible!—
“And yet, methinks, we once heard Khobad tell
“That such he'd witness'd in a long-past time
“For a like act—but 'tis so rare a crime.”

XI.

Alas! the Georgian's tale is all too true;
And Leila's lot assumes a darker hue.
Could the loved, distant youth she weeps for—he
Whose tend'rest thoughts hang round her constantly—
Look on her now, he'd know, his worst of fears,
The prelude to disgrace and death, appears.

Of late her languid motion in the dance
Has often drawn th' observant matron's glance:
And at the bath, this morn, a girl—whose eye
Rested upon her figure casually—
Sang, half in jest, "O pretty palm bear fruit!"—
Charged with her fault, she stood abash'd, and mute;
O'er her pale brow and breast bright blushes shot,
Her tears burst forth—but she denied it not.
Then rose in hot reproach the matron's wrath,
And rudely she was hurried from the bath;
And from the fair ones round her gathering,
To gaze and wonder at that guilty thing.
Ungenerous they! there needed not their cry,
Their shrinking back from her in mockery,
Whilst, with a shame-bow'd head, she pass'd the door,
And left them—to be seen, perhaps, no more.

And soon this rumour through the harem flies—
Waking its inmates' clamours of surprise—
The Kurd's not worthy of the Shah's regard,
And in the tower is now, a prisoner, barr'd.

But gradually, ere many days have died,
The waves of wonder, spent in words, subside.
And some new silks arriving, which transport,
With their gay hues, the ladies of the court,
Quick is the hapless Kurd—her doubtful doom,
Whether of mutilation, or the tomb—
Swept from the tablets of their memories,
By the rich raiment which enchants their eyes.

XII.

O'er her—a captive in the turret's cell,
Where till the Shah's return 'tis said she'll dwell—
Day follows day, and brings her scarcely aught
To help along the heavy hours, save thought.
For now no minstrel-skill employs her care,
'Twill ne'er be needed for the royal ear :
Nor is she taught t' adorn with dress, and art,
Her charms—found worthless for the royal heart.
And though her needle's task she strives to ply,
'Tis with a listless hand, and absent eye.

Oft has the matron questioned her, t' obtain
Some knowledge of her lover, but in vain ;
And oft exclaimed, "the witch! though meek her face
"Her heart has got the daring of her race."—
Ah yes! 'tis love expands her spirit—love,
That fires to courage ev'n the timid dove—
And makes her vow no bribe, no torturing,
From her seal'd lips th' adored one's name shall wring.

XIII.

Now none have ingress to her cell, except
Khobad, by whom her prison's keys are kept ;
And one mute, aged slave of long-tried faith,
Who brings the meal, and tends her at the bath ;
And oft observes the captive furtively,
Lest dark despair should urge th' attempt to die.

And now she hears no sports, nor merry talk ;
And the few paces of her narrow walk
Are from her couch to one small window's bar,
From which she, wishfully, looks forth afar.
Ah ! while she gazes from that lattice, down
On the calm village roofs of Shemiroun,
Sadly she feels their meanest maidens, free,
With a loved home, are happier far than she.
Often she stands for hours, with pensive eye
Fix'd on the mountains, and the placid sky—
Fix'd until childhood's bygone days arise,
And her own valley-home before her lies.
Oft does she think, "ye mountains, oh how near !
" Short seems the desert way from them to here—
Could I but cross it "—then imagin'd schemes,
What she would do, rise fast and fair as dreams ;
'Till rous'd abruptly, and recall'd to woe
By the lone sentry's jarring song below,
Down to harsh truth her visions sudden bow,
On the stern iron bar declines her brow,

And while its strength, her helpless state, bespeaks,
The bitter tears are trickling o'er her cheeks.

Still hope sustains her: some strange pity sprung
In Khobad's breast for one so lorn, and young,
Has check'd his telling her how dire may be
Her luckless faults impending penalty.
Therefore, although she fears, and feels too sure,
That some sharp punishment she'll have t' endure,
Still for that fault she can but thank her star,—
'Twill shield her, save her, from the dreaded Shah.
Oh this—unlooked-for—ev'n as scarce-hoped life
Spared to the merchant, by the bandit's knife—
Dispels her chief of terrors; sudd'nly fills
Her heart with joy that veils all minor ills;
And leads her in less hopeless mood t' await,
And think less wildly on, the course of fate.

Oft she conjectures of her punishment:
Will she be scourg'd, then back to Shiraz sent?
If so, oh fate! in some propitious hour,
Again may Selim seek her in that bower.
Will she be sold in some slave mart? if so
Could she not by some means make Selim know:
He then would purchase her—all grief be o'er—
And she'd be his—be his—to part no more!

Often, when o'er her softly smiles the night—
When the gold crescent crowns the mountain height—
And scarce a whisper floats from earth to sky,
Save from afar the prowling jackal's cry,

Save from below the sentry's clanking arms—
Strangely she's soul-rapt by the hour's sweet charms.
The moon, the time, the quiet starry dome
Raise a fair vision of her Shiraz home.
Again, while sleep its slaves, she quits her bed ;
Steals through its garden where the shadows spread ;
Sits in its bower, and lists to Selim's voice,
And hears his vow, and feels her heart rejoice.
At these sweet thoughts she prays—with heavenward eyes
And uprais'd hands, in hopeful ecstasies—
“ On us, O Allah ! let thy favour shine !
“ Safe send him home, to be, for ever, mine ! ”

Ah gentle girl ! may destiny unroll
Whate'er is wished by thy prophetic soul ;
May the bright visions which at times impart
Hopes that delight thee, and uphold thy heart,
Be not th' illusive waters of the waste
Which mock the traveller hurrying on to taste ;
And when the lake of joy thou think'st to sip
May the hot sands of death not meet thy lip !

But soon thy doubts will cease, thy doom be known ;
Glad tidings come—Khorasan's chief's o'erthrown ;
And homeward marches, fann'd by conquest's wings,
The Light of Persia's throne ! the king of kings.

CANTO VI.

I.

On Teh'ran's mountains, fav'ring shines the sun,
Who more than half his daily course hath done,
And smiles a welcome from the azure dome,
On Persia's Might—now, near his summer home.

Thither, since morn's first beam of orient light
Flash'd on its turrets, from the Elburz height
Have spurring couriers cross'd the busy plain,
T' announce th' approaching of th' imperial train.
And from its harem-terrace—where, on high,
Wave glitt'ring banners to the wind's soft sigh—
For hours, have sparkling eyes, behind the screens,
Watch'd for their lord, and view'd the plain's gay scenes.
Far on the road the people lavish flowers :
Throng'd are the city's flag-deck'd wall and towers :
And eager thousands, clad in best array,
Are scatter'd widely o'er the arid way. }
And active camp-attendants, forward sent,
Are sudd'nly raising many a snowy tent,
Some for the station'd troops, and some for those
Not yet dismiss'd to distant home's repose.

But hark !—the crowds no longer vainly wait,
They shout, “he comes! hu Allah! God is great!”—
Shrill, o’er the plain, resounds the trumpet’s blast;
Onward the drum-beat, rolling, echoes fast;
Clouds upon clouds of sunlit sand advance,
While sparkling spear-points, star like, ’midst them dance.
The royal standards, touch’d by heaven’s bright beam,
Gradual approaching, more distinctly gleam.
Nearer the music swells : triumphant cries,
From rank to rank, for home! for Persia! rise.
Oft, through the dust, the jewell’d corslets shine,
And the steeds’ trappings show the foremost line;
And lo! with Persia’s noblest cavalry,
Comes the great chief—the star of every eye.

Onward he rides : now met by subject throngs,
Whose shouts exceed the trumpets, drums and gongs :
Whilst, from his palace walls, the cannons roar,
Thund’ring loud greetings to the conqueror.
Onward the gathering multitude proceeds,
Praising the Prophet, and their sovereign’s deeds,
Till the guns’ signals, far around, report
The Shah dismounts within his palace court;
His halls receive him, and his guards are free,
To seek the joys of rest, or revelry.

II.

O Fortune, Fortune! how thou shunn’st distress,
Then showerest favours when they’re valueless!—

Well is it said, thy moonlight shows the pass
Just when the merchant sinks in the morass :
And, that thy streamlets to the delver rise,
When on the waste his courser, thirsting dies.

Thus thinks—while seated lonely in his tent,
Pitch'd by the lofty palace battlement,
Pretending weary limbs and sleepy mood,
To keep his comrades from his solitude—
The young Nasákchi, Selim.—From the fold,
Of his shawl belt, he takes some coins of gold,
And, gazing on them—with no cheerful eye—
Utters, with mournful tone and heavy sigh,
“ O, my lost life ! my Leila !—such is fate !
“ Scarce is she sold, when lo ! I'm rich—too late.
“ Ah ! had this wealth, but three months since, been mine,
“ How calmly now her star of life would shine :
“ All would be well,—again my heart would feel
“ Her clinging, gentle love around it steal :
“ Her voice, her eyes, my safe return would bless,—
“ Not heaven could give me more of happiness.
“ But now—tis useless !—nought can burst her chain,
“ Wretched, for life, a captive she'll remain :
“ Soon cast aside—mere passion's transient toy—
“ Not fondly lov'd—not bless'd with home's calm joy !
“ Yet, Allah, will she bear new love ! oh no !
“ The drug she'll fly to, or the dagger's blow,
“ I know her soul—its courage in despair—
“ A slave's dull life, but not forced love, she'll bear.

“ Perhaps, already, has her grief’s wild strife
“ Urg’d her to this, or pining clos’d her life ;
“ Or, if she live, perhaps her shame appears,—
“ A dungeon sees her anguish and her fears ;
“ And oh ! if thus—what may not hap—this night !
“ Where will she be when dawns to-morrow’s light !

III.

Thus mourns he for the lost one : since that hour,
When fate transferr’d her to the royal power,
When, in the mosque, he listened to her cries,
Few days have pass’d that have not heard his sighs.
Oft have his comrades, whilst they talk’d of home,
And girls belov’d who sigh to see them come,
Tortur’d his feelings—made more desolate
By the bright contrast with his own dark fate.
And as—the while approaching Teh’ran’s plain,
And those stern walls which, all his care, contain—
He’s felt the crisis of her doom draw near,
More sombre still have grown his doubts and fear.

IV.

While in his tent—with fev’rish brow and breast—
Lonely, he ponders—hourly, more depress’d—
The palace harem waits impatiently,
The gladd’ning presence of th’ imperial eye.
Now from its halls is gone the sunset ray ;
But brilliant lanterns form a lovelier day.

Clearly they show the domes, the colour'd walls,
The mirror'd columns, and the fountains' falls ;
The rich-clad slaves, and banquet-boards that hold
Fruits, fragrant flowers, and porcelain and gold ;
And the young mirthful beauties, scatter'd o'er
The priceless carpets and mosaic floor.

Around th' apartments, Khobad walks to see
That nought requir'd has miss'd his memory.
Arduous have been his cares—which cause, perchance,
The look that shades his agèd countenance.
All is prepared—hark, hark ! the sovereign comes !
The roofs resound with song, guitars, and drums.
The female minstrels lead his welcome way,
Swelling their voices with the greeting lay ;
And others, ranged on either side the throne,
Lovely as rows of tulips newly blown,
While on between them steps their mighty lord,
Sing of the valour of the Persian sword.
Nobly, and well, he looks : his vigorous form,
Which comes uninjur'd from the battle's storm,
Hath doff'd its warrior garb—from helm to boot—
For now his harem's gifts more meetly suit ;
Th' embroidered skull-cap, slippers, girdling shawl,
Green silken vest, and roseate robe o'er all.
And pleas'd he seems ; and whilst he passes by,
Smiling, he nods to many a sparkling eye ;
And utters, “ ay ! the blessèd Prophet knows
“ Fair lips are better than the spears of foes.”

V.

Now on his throne, whose purple draperies,
And silken cushions give voluptuous ease,
Reclines the Shah,—in no ungenial mood,
By generous wine and beauty to be woo'd.
Soon does the ruby nectar of the bowl
Diffuse the warm, sweet quiet, o'er his soul.
He looks around,—on lovely groups, whose eyes
Would tempt a dervise from his reveries ;
All choicest flowers remov'd from Georgia's gales,
From fair Circassia's, and Armenia's vales,
And while he marks them—some, with languid grace,
Lounging on couches at a column's base—
Some, at the banquet board, or gliding by,
So boldly arch, or delicately shy—
And feels the power of wine, and beauty's chain,
And the soft warblings of the minstrel train,
He swears by Allah, earth to him has given
No poor ensamples of the joys of heaven.

Now cease the triumph songs : the minstrels move
Their monarch's heart with melting lays of love.
A light-ton'd trumpet sounds, and forward spring—
With roses crown'd, and jewels glittering,
Shaking soft music from the tiny bells
That deck their tresses bound with golden spells—
The blooming, laughing Peris of the dance,
And, fawn-like moving, towards the throne advance.

Oh, sure ! they're lovely as those sacred girls,
Who, in pavillions of celestial pearls,

Are kept in Paradise, as bless'd rewards
For the brave deeds of true believers' swords.
Graceful as frolic seabirds hov'ring o'er
The whisp'ring wavelets of the Caspian shore,
They act the dance—its figures, which present
A sportive joy, or winning languishment ;
And strive, with many a fascinating wile,
To win th' approval of the royal smile.

VI.

Not vain their efforts : the observant throng,
Slaves, dancers, minstrels, and the girls of song—
O'er whom the monarch's faintest ire, or praise,
Comes as the gloom of night, or morn's glad rays—
See with delight their lord is pleased : his eyes,
Chain'd by the dancer's gentle witcheries,
With warm expression o'er each figure rove,—
He seems uncertain, which, the most to love.
But what !—some sudden thought arises !—why
Looks he amongst them with such scrutiny ?
What does he miss, for which his rapid glance
Flies to the group that watch the playful dance ?
Is it some just remember'd face he seeks,
Yet cannot find ?—impatiently he speaks :
“ Where is the Kurd—my new-found Shiraz bird ?”—
Through the saloon the loud-ton'd question's heard,
And yet no girl bounds forward joyously—
Proud to be call'd, before the royal eye :

But, as if fear were sudd'nly cast around—
As by the desert sand-storm's first, faint sound—
The dancers pause—and stops the minstrelsy—
And silence reigns, for no one gives reply.

'Tis but a moment that the stillness lasts :
His gaze, on Khobad's face, the monarch casts ;
And with light frown, demands, " why speak'st thou not ?
" Is the Shah's will unheeded, or forgot ?
" What means this silence, is she ill, or dead ?"—
Humbly the aged servant bows his head—
With falt'ring tongue replies, " the Kurd is well"—
If time were given him, doubtless, more he'd tell ;
But instantly, his master bids, " begone !
" Quick—bring the beauty to our harem throne !"

VII.

Well does the monarch know that oft arise,
Amongst the houris of his paradise,
Light gusts of rivalry and waywardness,
Which practis'd Khobad ev'n, can scarce suppress.
And now he deems that some dispute, some pique,
Of which her playmates hesitate to speak,
Or bashful feelings—of himself, afraid—
Keep from the feast the, almost, stranger maid.
He bids the dance proceed :—the fairy band,
Rous'd by the lutes, again link hand to hand,
And on the throng-surrounded marble space,
Renew their gestures of voluptuous grace.

The monarch deems not, whilst his fancy warms
In admiration of those fair young forms,
While gladness seems to animate their feet,
How fast their hearts with fear's excitement beat.
His ear detects not many a trembling note,
'Mongst the sweet warblings that around him float ;
Nor marks his eye, whilst o'er the bowl he stoops,
The looks, the whispers, of th' attendant groups.
He little thinks that in this festive hall,
Though mirth resounds, there breathes not 'mongst them all,
Slaves, minstrels, beauties, glitt'ring round his throne,
One breast, in perfect calmness, save his own.

VIII.

For though they care not if this favourite fair
Lay dead and bleaching in her mountain air,
They dread the outburst of his coming wrath—
Fierce as a torrent broken from its path—
And, with a restless expectation, wait,
To see the wretched girl, and know her fate.
Oft are their eager, furtive glances, cast
To yonder archway through which Khobad pass'd.
Why comes he not ? each moment seems an age !
Is't that he dare not meet his master's rage ?

But look ! 'tis he, and with him—who could know,
In that sad thing ! that image of deep woe !
The once bright Kurd ?—she wears no rich array,
No sparkling gems befitting this glad day,

But humble garments of a sombre blue,
 O'er which impends a veil of like dull hue.
 Along the gorgeous hall, by Khobad led,
 With heaving bosom, and declining head,
 With falt'ring foot she comes : and then again
 The dancing stops, and dies each minstrel's strain ;
 The anxious fair-ones, rank'd before the throne,
 Divide—fall back—and leave the two, alone.

IX.

Save the soft music of the fountain's bound,
 Throughout th' apartment, hush'd is every sound.
 Mute, and with low'ring look that spreads dismay—
 His half-rais'd wine-cup pausing on its way—
 The wond'ring Shah regards this sudden scene,
 The Kurd's unseemly garb, and downcast mien.
 He speaks not—but his stern, inquiring eyes
 Demand the purport of her strange disguise :
 This, Khobad feels,—and, back from form and face,
 Lifting the veil which hides her great disgrace,
 He thus the silence breaks “dread lord, behold !
 “That which thy servant trembles to unfold,—
 “Look on this slave—alas ! her form is shame—
 “Of thee unworthy—fall'n from maiden fame.”

Scarce has he uttered, and displayed to sight,
 Her panting form, and face so deadly white—
 Scarce has she time to sink, and prostrate, press
 The marble floor with brow of lowliness—

Ere from his throne th' infuriate Shah starts up,
And madly dashing down th' uplifted cup,
Pale with his baffled hope, and sudd'n surprise,
Fierce as the thunder-burst to Khobad cries,
"Blights on the slave ! what work is here ? is *this*
"Thy lord's best welcome, and his new-bought bliss ?
"Truly thou keep'st his harem well—to bring
"Beneath these domes yon vile, polluted thing !—
"How is she thus ? whose deed accurs'd is there ?
"Speak ! on thy life—and what thou know'st declare !"

X.

Eager with expectation, every eye
Is turn'd to Khobad whilst he gives reply ;
"Light of the world ! thy servant's words are few,—
"Soon as her guilt was found to be too true,
"Quick, to the Shiraz dwelling whence she came,
"Guards were dispatch'd, with terrors of thy name.
"The merchant's household all—his spouse, his slaves
"Were questioned, trembling 'neath the upraised staves.
"But vain th' inquiry—nought could they impart—
"The utmost wonder fill'd each frighten'd heart ;
"And all, upon our holy Prophet's creed,
"Swore that they knew not aught of this foul deed.
"Twofold her cost they sent, and rich attire,
"Marks of their sorrow, and t'avert thine ire.
"Dread Lord ! they utter'd truth ; this slave confess'd
"That whilst they slept she met a midnight guest ;

“ Her vows she pledg’d—her lover too had said,
 “ With Koran oath, he’d buy her soon, and wed ;
 “ Oft to the harem garden did he come—
 “ His name I’ve ask’d, to that she’s firmly dumb.”

Ceasing, submissive to the throne he bows :—
 The Shah, with lips compress’d, and lowering brows,
 Looks on that object—stretch’d so suppliant there,
 Half hid beneath her silken jetty hair—
 And, with a voice at which each listener shakes,
 Sternly, the momentary silence, breaks :
 “ Curs’d be the Kurdish witch—accurs’d her vow !
 “ Wedded, or not—enough ! behold her now !—
 “ And he—vile dog—may fiends torment his soul !—
 “ Now, by my beard, his head, or hers shall roll,—
 “ Wanton ! look up—proclaim thy paramour,
 “ Or earth shall hold thee ere this night be o’er.”

XI.

Deep stillness reigns—and all, in keen suspense,
 Wait her reply with interest intense ;
 And faint the flush from many a fair one’s cheek,
 Who longs, yet almost dreads, to hear her speak.
 She rises—kneels—and, looking up, displays—
 Allah ! how sad an aspect !—they who gaze
 May well imagine—by her heaving breast,
 On which her white, clasp’d hands are tightly press’d—
 By the loud, hurried breathings of her heart,
 Through those pale lips, now quiv’ring and apart—

And by that wand'ring, dark, dilated eye,
How her soul maddens with its agony.
Her's is a grief of helplessness, and fears,
Too sudden, burning, for relief of tears.

Wildly her eyes rove o'er the crowd around,
As though, to aid her, Selim forth might bound.
She feels, ev'n now, perhaps he wanders near—
A few walls part them—and yet, not to hear
One farewell word, t' exchange one look, before
She passes death's already opening door—
Oh ! torturing, wretched thought ! but hark ! again,
Comes like a trumpet, to her wilder'd brain,
The Shah's command, " speak minion ! instantly,
Declare the unblest'd miscreant's name, or die."

See, how she hesitates !—afraid to bring
The menac'd doom that waits her answering ;
Now, heav'nward looking—now, to that dread throne—
She gasps—she speaks—how hollow is her tone !—
" Oh ! mercy ! mercy ! mighty lord ! forgive !
" To die—so soon—to die—oh ! let me live !
" His name—great Allah ! help me—no ! oh, no !
" Lord ! 'tis too humble for thine anger's blow—
" Let me not die ?"—

Though many a gazer here
Had seen, scarce mov'd, a death-doom'd culprit's fear,
Yet, the despairing, panting energy
Of that young voice—the anguish of that eye,

Thrill them with liveliest pity, ev'n to pain :
Breathless they stand :—alas ! she sues in vain.
Her tongue's evasive answer adds fresh fire
To the Shah's rage, which springs from balk'd desire.
Waving his hand to Khobad, fierce he cries,
“ Away !—the bowstring—be't thy charge, she dies ;
“ Yet hold !—what fate is theirs who thus deface
“ Our harem's honour with so foul disgrace ?
“ Ay, I remember ;—from its topmost tower,
“ Let her be headlong hurl'd, at midnight's hour,
“ Stifle her shrieks !—away with her ! away !—
“ Minstrels play on !”——

The ready slaves obey ;

They seize the struggling girl—her veil is cast
Around her head—upon her lips held fast,
Checking her piteous screams—and, whilst again
The fair musicians raise the festive strain,
And mirth proceeds, through yonder arch is borne
Their lost companion—never to return.

XII.

Back to her turret's cell she's quick convey'd ;
Now, by the slaves, along its floor is laid.
One holds a lamp, for through the window falls
Too little moonlight to illume its walls ;
Whilst Khobad—fearing lest she strive t' escape,
By self-giv'n death, the tower's tremendous leap—
Sees that they chain her firmly down, nor fail
To link her wrists—and now they loose her veil.

"Save me" she gasps ; although one thought would tell
Those slaves are deaf to her as this stone cell.
They turn—depart—the door is clos'd—yet no—
Khobad steps sudd'nly in, and, stooping low,
Breathes in her ear, with truthful energy,
" Leila ! be calm—fear not—thou shalt not die."
He's gone—he bars the door—his footfall's sound,
Faints from her ear, and all is still around.

Fix'd, for a minute, are her starting eyes
On the dim door, with straining, wild surprise.
The sudd'n words have half o'erwhelm'd her soul ;
Doubt, hope, amazement, wave-like, o'er it roll ;
But midst th' emotions, hope springs up supreme,
And thoughts flash o'er her thus,—I do not dream ?
I feel this chain—I know that here I lie—
'Twas Khobad's voice that said, " Thou shalt not die"
I know 'twas Khobad's fingers grasp'd my arm—
Allah ! it was—he said, " fear not ! be calm."—
What can he mean ? oh ! has he power to save ?
To snatch me from th' already yawning grave ?
He has ! oh Allah ! yes ! he has—or why
Bid me not fear, and say I shall not die.
Yes ! he will save me !—Here her feelings' strife,
And the one rapturous thought of rescu'd life,
Brilliant as lightning 'midst the frantic storm,
Shake, ev'n to agony, her fetter'd form :
Her bosom heaves—she sobs convulsively—
And the loos'd tears are gushing fast and free.

XIII.

Long does she weep :—oh ! grateful as the shower
To the parch'd valley, and its drooping flower,
Flow forth the tears that tranquillize the pain
Of her o'erburden'd heart, and burning brain.
Gradual as sinks the desert-tempest's wind,
Subsides the madd'ning tumult of her mind ;
And dazzling hope repels her wild alarm ;
And thought returns, comparatively calm.

Still do her tears, refreshing, flow—and start
In fitful gushings from her panting heart :
Oft she repeats (as though more vivid—clear—
Beams their glad truth when sounding to her ear)
The words of Khobad : and they now excite
This thought—which came not with her sudd'n delight—
Why, o'er her, heedless of his lord's command,
Casts he the shadow of his shelt'ring hand ?

Mem'ry reviews his conduct since that morn
When to this cell, his captive, she was borne.
And many incidents—his voice's tone,
Harsh, if a slave stood by, kind when alone—
His often bringing to her dainty food—
His converse to beguile her solitude—
His frequent questions of her life's young days—
And on her face, sometimes, a pitying gaze—
Though trifles which, till now, she mark'd not—tend
To feed the hope that Khobad is her friend.

XIV.

But still does fancy vainly meditate,
 From what could spring this interest in her fate.
 Ev'n, though he pity—pity flees afar,
 When come the bowstring and the scimytar :
 For her why venture aught?—

Again, her eyes

Fix towards the door,—she hears its fast'nings rise :
 She feels this moment brings her life ! or death !
 Cold runs her blood—suspended stops her breath—
 And yet those footsteps, noiseless on the floor—
 That quiet motion of the closing door—
 Hint covert friendliness :—no lamp displays
 The cloak-wrapt comer's visage to her gaze ;
 But, while she utters, “Allah !” on her ear
 Falls Khobad's whisper, “hush thou need'st not fear.”

He kneels beside her ; now removes the bands,
 And chains that hold her throbbing waist, and hands.
 Mute he regards her ; and the moon's strong light
 Presents his aspect to her anxious sight,
 Pale is his agèd cheek ; and restlessly,
 And with unwonted lustre, gleams his eye.
 He sees she scarcely dares believe,—and thus,
 Low speaking, solves, what seems mysterious.
 “ List to me Leila !—let thy terrors cease—
 “ By Khobad's soul ! his words are truth and peace.
 “ Strange may'st thou deem it that the Shah's decree,
 “ My fear, faith, duty, are forgot for thee ;

“ But Destiny works on, unguess’d—unseen—
“ The gloomiest pass oft leads to valleys green,—
“ And wondrous ’tis, to *me*, the tale should come,
“ Of thy slain parents, and thy distant home.

“ I’ve heard theesay that, on the night when fell
“ The Turk’man troop upon thy father’s dell,
“ Save him and Hassan, all his band that went
“ To chase the ass, were absent from his tent ;
“ But in it, with them, slept some prisoner,
“ Or wounded guest, too weak to hold a spear :
“ Now, mark, my child ! the hand of Destiny—
“ Behold that wounded stranger ! I am he.

“ Hear how this happen’d :—by the Shah’s command,
“ Far had I travell’d through thy native land.
“ Returning home, one day my escort made
“ The noontide halt within a huge rock’s shade.
“ Our steeds were grazing by the limpid rill,
“ Ourselves enjoy’d the brief repose, and meal.
“ Doubtless, for miles, from many a mountain-height,
“ An Eeliant band had held us near in sight :
“ Had watch’d, and waited, for our time of rest ;—
“ Idly we sat, by noontide’s heat oppress’d,
“ When, from the rocks behind us, rushing out,
“ It dash’d amongst us with its dreaded shout.
“ Confounded by th’ attack, some fought, some fled,
“ The most were plunder’d, two were stricken dead. ;
“ Stunn’d by this heavy matchlock wound—which now,
“ Thanks to thy mother’s hand, scarce scars my brow—

“ Senseless I fell—thy vale was near the fray,
“ And fortune led thy sire to where I lay.
“ He found me—bore me to his tent, and there,
“ For weeks, thy mother gave me gentlest care ;
“ Then, guarded by the servants of my host,
“ I reach’d this palace, and resum’d my post.
“ Hush, hush ! be calm !—suppress thy joy till free,
“ Look at these walls—thou’rt yet in jeopardy :
“ Thou guessest true—thy parents, brothers live—
“ Dwell in thy home, and still for thee oft grieve.
“ A few days since, my courier to their dell
“ Return’d with tidings that thy friends were well.
“ Of thee, I’ve told them nought—’twere hardly wise—
“ Their days of doubt would be but miseries.
“ Thy nurse Shireen too lives, and tells this tale,—
“ Scarce had the Turk’man borne thee from the vale,
“ When thy sire’s men, who heard the shrieks of fright,
“ Rush’d to the dell and put the foe to flight.
“ Thy sire and Hassan, side by side, were found,
“ With those they slew, faint, bleeding on the ground.
“ Thy parent’s wounds soon heal’d, for though severe,
“ Fate sent not death upon the Turk’man’s spear :
“ Nor was thy mother injur’d much, for though,
“ Cast o’er the steep rock by the bandit’s blow,
“ She held the brushwood jutting from its side,—
“ As for poor Hassan, ere next morn, he died,
“ Leila ! thy sire receiv’d the helpless guest,
“ And gratitude still glows in Khobad’s breast ;

“ And by great Allah’s grace, the proof shall be,
“ Ere two moons more, he’ll glad thy home with thee :
“ The pearls of kindness are too rare on earth
“ To be forgotten as of little worth !
“ Thanks to my gold, and favours oft conferr’d,
“ I’ve trusty slaves, obedient to my word :
“ And if I fall—for should thy flight be known,
“ This head will roll before its master’s throne—
“ It little matters if an aged tree
“ Die by the lightning’s stroke, or gradually.”

XV.

He pauses : and his thoughts seem sudd’nly gone
To some far subject—sad to dwell upon.
His eye looks sorrow—and yet, now, its light,
As though from anger, kindles fiercely bright ;
And tears, perhaps, have trickled to his cheeks ;
His hand sweeps o’er them, and again he speaks.

“ Allah be prais’d ! to aid me, fate hath sent
“ Th’ avenging hour ! the fitting instrument !—
“ Khobad is lonely ;—thirteen years are past
“ Since died his sister—she, his third, and last.
“ She left one infant girl,—it grew, a thing,
“ Beautiful as heaven ! lightsome as the spring !—
“ I watch’d it—lov’d it—’twas the sole, sweet flower
“ That shed a charm on many a cheerless hour ;
“ And never beam’d its eyes so joyously,
“ As when ’twould bound, with open arms, to me,

“ One morn, as usual, to my fairy’s bed,
“ I went to wake it, and I found it—dead !
“ By the swell’n, purple lips, and livid skin,
“ I saw that deadly venom work’d within.
“ My frantic grief soon brought the harem ;—none
“ Could tell how happ’d it,—all seem’d touch’d, save one.
“ Her tongue spoke pity, but a fiendish glee
“ Lurk’d in her eyes, which told my heart ’twas she.
“ I guess’d, I felt the deed was hers ; and time
“ Has brought conviction to me of her crime.
“ Thou know’st that crone Zuleika—her who keeps
“ The costly shawls on which the monarch sleeps ?
“ Fell as a tigress is the witch’s soul ;
“ She’s fear’d by all o’er whom she holds control ;
“ And I, when rais’d to guide the harem’s state,
“ Became the object of her envious hate.
“ She was the murd’ress ! well she flung the dart
“ To pierce my bosom in its tend’rest part.
“ I vow’d a deep revenge ; the time is here,—
“ But hark !—the watch drums ! midnight fast draws near,
“ I must away—I’ve much to do this hour—
“ And be thou ready, soon to quit this tower ;
“ And hear me, trust me, Leila !—when thou’rt free,
“ Should’st thou desire to send to, or to see
“ Him whom thou lov’st at Shiraz, let me know,
“ I’ll aid thee—ha ! what makes the moonlight go !
“ Black clouds are flitting o’er yon Elburz’ crests—
“ Hark ! ’tis the thunder ! heaven itself assists !

“ Seldom do storms come o’er the summer’s night—
“ ’Tis a good omen for we want not light,
“ Allah protect thee !—I’ll return”—

He’s gone ;
Th’ astonish’d Kurdish girl remains alone ;
And thinks of Selim,—and, with anguish, sighs,
“ Perhaps, in far Khorasan’s earth, he lies.”
He’s gone ; but ere this hour is pass’d returns ;
And from the captive girl, her secret learns ;
And that so sudden was her change of state,
That Selim knew not of her hapless fate.

XVI.

The night moves on :—the thunder’s solemn sound
Rolls mutteringly amongst the hills around.
Athwart the dark blue vault, in many a form,
Hasten the vapoury heralds of a storm ;
Now, web-like, veiling yonder orb,—and now,
Taking its lustre from the mountain’s brow ;
While the gold lightnings, with the moonbeams vie,
Playing all o’er the cloud-fleck’d canopy.
Oft with the mirthful shout and minstrel strain,
Of the gay palace, and the tented plain,
Mingles the wind’s low, melancholy moan,
And the keen, prowling jackal’s wailing tone.

Oh ! let the tempest come—its thunders roll !
’Twould rage less fierce than that in Selim’s soul ;

All which he fear'd, on Fate's dark current flows,
The worst approaches, and this worst—he knows.
Scarcely an hour ago, a soldier sent
With sudden mandate, sought his silent tent ;
And, having (carelessly, as one to whom
It matter'd little) told the Kurd's dread doom,
Bade him, at midnight, with his men to go,
And watch the turret from the court below :
Wait for the body of the hurl'd-down slave,
And thence, at once, convey it to the grave.
Then, as the lone Nasúkchi seem'd oppress'd
With weariness that begg'd for sleep and rest.
He left him, off'ring—for the time was near—
To bid his men prepare the grave, and bier.

XVII.

'Twas well that Selim feign'd fatigue of limb :
'Twas well the lantern in his tent shone dim :
His sudd'nly-ashy cheeks, his gleaming eyes,
His half-chok'd hollow voice, and brief replies
Might, else, have led that messenger to guess
The dangerous truth—or mock such tenderness.
Oh ! while he heard his Leila's doom—although,
Oft had his fears presag'd th' impending blow—
The soldier's words, which left his hope without
The feeble help of ev'n a torturing doubt,
Smote on his heart with sick'ning certainty,
And chilling terror at the Shah's decree.

His trembling form—as though some fiend of death
Had, hov’ring, touch’d it with his icy breath—
To half its wonted vigour seem’d subdued,
And, on his brow, cold drops of anguish stood.
Now left, he sits unseen, with grief-bow’d head,
With hand-hid eyes, from which no tears are shed.
Fast thronging, fearful thoughts—of what must be,
At this dark hour, his Leila’s agony—
Of the resistless deed of blood so near—
And of himself, too much her murderer—
Plunge his sad spirit, with a whirlpool’s force,
In deep despair, wild horror and remorse.
The breathings of strong anguish heave his breast ;
Tightly his fingers on his brow are press’d ;
And oft escapes, in whispers hoarse and low,
Thus, incoherently, his soul’s dark woe.
“ Oh, Heaven ! ’tis come,—all, all—my utmost dread —
“ Leila ! this night thou’lt mingle with the dead ;—
“ A death so horrible ! so young to die !—
“ Allah ! she is not guilty—no—’tis I :
“ And yet, I cannot, cannot save her !—oh !
“ How glad, for her, this heart’s last drop would flow !—
“ But she will die—will die—’tis destiny—
“ Its page is written, and its work *must* be.
“ Angel of pity ! help her—bring relief—
“ Oh ! let the pangs of savage death be brief.
“ Doubtless, she thinks I’m ’mongst the revellers here,
“ Yet quite unconscious that herself is near ;

“ And vainly longs for means by which to tell
“ Her wretched lot to me—her last farewell.
“ Perhaps she guesses that stern Fate, this night,
“ Will give her mangled body to my sight ;—
“ Oh ! must I see those happy eyes—that face—
“ That gentle form—a crush’d and gory mass ?
“ Fiends ! *can* it be ?—great Heaven ! my heart feels clad
“ In kindling flame—my brain turns sick—is mad !
“ Prophet of Allah ! hark ! the watch-guard’s drum :
“ The sentry’s challenge—ay, her hour is come !”—

Quick, he starts up—his bloodless lips compress’d—
His fingers clench’d—and strangely calm his breast :
Not the forc’d calm of passions ’neath control ;
’Tis strong despair that strains, upholds his soul :
Ev’n as the stormy Caspian’s wildest gale
Smoothes, though it almost rives, the lab’ring sail.

Forth from the tent he steps : and now, along
The soldier-scatter’d court—where jest, and song,
And loud carousal dull the thunder’s sounds—
He hurries onward towards the harem grounds.
He hears his comrades’ mirth—he answers those
Who ask him whither in such haste he goes ;
Yet acts he scarcely conscious, though aright,—
His task alone is present to his sight—
As, on one object fix’d, the gazing eye
Sees, but observes not, what is passing by.

Now reaches he the harem’s lofty wall ;
A massive postern opens at his call ;

The sentry cries, "this night befits thy sport"—
He hastens on—now gains the fatal court.

XVIII.

Around this lonely and neglected place,
Which skirts the palace at its rocky base,
Tall, dark pinasters form a sombre screen,
And from the harem tower alone 'tis seen.
Within, 'tis nought but scatter'd heaps of stone,
O'er which wild brambles and rank weeds have grown.
And far below the crowning tower—whose height
A circling terrace half conceals from sight—
Is one rough mound, which oft, with crashing force,
Hath met some falling culprit's gory corse.

Here—a few paces from that rugged mound—
Seated at ease, and smoking, on the ground,
And scarcely thinking of the victim's fate,
With shroud and bier, the four corpse-bearers wait.
Their mutter'd wish is, that their work were done—
It breaks their night's carouse, but just begun ;
And the sad murmurs of th' increasing breeze
Sound somewhat dismal through these darksome trees.

Here also—gazing towards that tower on high,
Which moon-gleams show when clouds have flitted by—
Mute, Selim stands, against a shading tree,
Feeling the moments an eternity.

Oft does the lightning's vivid flash illumine
The silent court, now wrapt in shadowy gloom ;

And, on its stillness, fast the thunder's roll,
In heavy peals, oppressive to the soul.
With the wild winds that sweep from plain and hill,
Come hollow moans, and airy voices shrill,
As of death's swift-wing'd spirits, hither flown
To catch th' expected victim's dying groan ;
While the drear gust, as though in mockery,
Brings the faint music-burst, and shout of glee.

More wildly, swiftly, o'er the face of heaven,
Across the moon, the sable clouds are driven ;
Letting the palace, lofty towers and walls,
Be seen at, only, quick, brief intervals.—
Hush !—'tis the wind—'twas so just now—and yet—
'Tis the loud muezzin from the minaret !—
Oh ! wer't the trumpet that shall wake the dead,
'Twould thrill not Selim's frame with colder dread :
That floating voice, announcing midnight's hour,
Gives the death-signal to yon harem tower.

Quick, the corpse-bearers from their seat arise ;
Fix'd on the terrace are their eager eyes ;
Hark ! shrieks are mingling with the whistling air !
Again—and nearer—cries of mad despair !—
Bright, o'er the tower, the sudden moonlight beams,—
Now, *now* she comes, by those incessant screams !
Look ! look ! they drag her forward—there are three—
That form between them, clad in white, is she !
On the low wall she's held—she seems to cling—
Her shrieks for mercy, through the thunder, *ring* !

Allah ! they hurl her off !—one piercing cry,
Wild as the blast, of madd'ning agony—
An awful silence—heavy fall's dull sound,
And the corpse-bearers hasten to the mound :
They pause not—quite incurious—to displace
The blood-wet veil which, fasten'd, hides her face ;
But lift the breathless mass—its soul is fled—
To those aloft they shout, “ she's dead, she's dead !”

XIX.

Still, by the tree stands Selim :—what have been
His soul's emotions during this dread scene,
Not ev'n himself could paint :—perhaps they seem'd,
As though through some horrific deed, he dream'd.
Their impulse urg'd him, when his burning sight
Mark'd the lov'd object hurl'd from yonder height,
Forward to spring—forgetting every eye,
And his own peril at discovery—
To gaze once more, upon his Leila's face,
And clasp her dying form in fond embrace.
But no !—that instant, one, who'd undescried
Enter'd the court, and waited at his side,
Chain'd, with a word, his foot,—then, bade the four
Bear hence the corpse, and earth the grave well o'er.
Startled, he turn'd,—the speaker's voice he knew,
The face of Khobad gravely met his view ;
And, in a moment—ev'n as sudden fear
Sobers the staring, half-drunk reveller—

Flash'd the sure feeling, clear as yon bright moon,
Calming his storm of thoughts—that all was known ;
That blows had forc'd from Leila's lips, his name,
And that his life will expiate her shame.

XX.

Does he feel terror ? does th' instinctive sense
Which sudden danger wakes, of self defence
Sweep her awhile from mem'ry, and excite
Th' immediate wish to save himself by flight ?
No !—Whilst his eye, now following the bier
Along the court, beholds it disappear,
Her early, dreadful death—his keen remorse—
And all his pleasure buried with that corse,
Lift up his soul o'er every selfish thought,
And life seems valueless—to fade to nought !—
No !—at this moment—undisturb'd by fear,
Fill'd but with one emotion—chill despair—
Calm he could kneel before the wrathful Shah,
And almost bless the smiting scimitar.

But mark ! how keenly Khobad's searching eyes
Fix on his looks, as though to scrutinize
His very soul :—the aged man, unseen,
Hath watch'd his agitated air and mien ;
His start of horror at the victim's shriek—
His tight clutch'd hands—his deadly-pallid cheek,—
And much suspects some chance hath told him *whom*,
Dark Fate hath destin'd to this awful doom.

And, whilst he asks him, "know'st thou aught of her
" Whose corse they carry to its sepulchre ?"

He half anticipates the answer—"Yes."

"I saw her face when first its loveliness

"Allur'd th' imperial eye—her veil was torn—

"I saw her, to our Shiraz palace borne."

Here, Khobad (glancing round him, lest some ear,
Although unlikely, be, perchance, too near)
On the youth's hesitating answer, breaks,—
Grasping his arm, impressively he speaks.

"Young soldier ! heed :—to me—but me alone—

"The secret of thy fatal love is known ;

"And, by our Prophet's holy creed, I swear,

"These lips shall breathe it not—not ev'n to air.

"Tell me then, truly, dost thou feel releas'd

"From one for whom thy passion long hath ceas'd ?

"Or would'st thou that thy Leila had not died,

"But liv'd to love thee, and become thy bride ?"

Scarce has he spoken, when the wild, sad stress,
Of these few words—"Oh, Allah, ! would I ?—Yes !"
And the youth's rais'd clasp'd hands, and heavenward eye
Prove his heart's anguish, and sincerity.

Khobad believes their truth ; his voice's tone

Changes to kindness, whilst he thus speaks on.

"Selim ! I trust thee,—hear what heaven still gives,—

"Gird up thy soul for joy !—thy Leila *lives* :

"The form thou saw'st from yonder terrace cast,

"Was but a substitute ;—in time long past,

“ A murderous beldam sear’d my breast with woe,
“ That corpse is her’s—revenge is come, though slow.
“ Nay, nay—kneel not—suppress thy tears—arise—
“ Be calm—and hear me, for the night fast flies.
“ Ask me no questions—let thy wonder wait—
“ Leila will tell thee of the deeds of Fate.
“ Her sire’s my friend, and hence for her and thee,
“ I place my trust, my life ! in jeopardy.——
“ Know’st thou the pine-grove, westward on this plain,
“ Where oft the caravan collects its train ?
“ There she awaits thee ; with her camel ride
“ Four trusty horsemen for her guard, and guide :
“ But mark ! they know not either of you, save,
“ That thou’rt their leader, she, thy fav’rite slave.
“ Near to the Zagros mounts her kindred dwell,
“ And she, this night, sets forth to seek their dell.
“ Now list ! and heed ! for one rash act might bring,
“ Quick to our necks, the scimytar or string.
“ Thou must desert the service of the Shah !—
“ And, for thy fortune, trust thy fav’ring star !—
“ Go, mount thy steed—depart with careless air,
“ As though some neighb’ring revel claim’d thy care.
“ As for thy tent and dress, leave all behind,
“ ’Twill make thy absence seem as undesigned :
“ Thy chief will wait—will wonder, for a day—
“ Will think thou’rt fallen in some secret fray—
“ Then will be raised a fav’rite comrade’s lot,
“ Thy post dispos’d of, and thyself forgot,—

" Here, take this bag—'twill oft befriend thee best—
 " 'Tis gold and gems—conceal it 'neath thy vest :
 " Nay, waste not words in thanks—to Leila prove
 " Thy grateful feelings by thy constant love :
 " Ere now I've mark'd thee, and have read thy mind,
 " I dare to trust thee, for thou'rt brave and kind.
 " Now, speed thou off—be watchful, cool, discreet—
 " Far from these walls, the morning sunbeams meet.
 " Behold yon sky ! 'tis growing clear and calm ;
 " The storm which threaten'd goes, and does no harm ;
 " So, o'er you both, has pass'd, th' imperial wrath,
 " Calm be the future of your lives' long path !—
 " Selim ! once more, depart—and should'st thou e'er
 " At Mecca kneel, name Khobad in thy prayer :
 " May Fate safe lead you to the Kurdish dell !
 " Allah protect you both ! farewell ! farewell !"

He turns away—and, in one minute more,
 Hath pass'd, and clos'd the wall's low, private door.

XXI.

Now, with emotions, oh ! how different
 From when he left it, Selim seeks his tent.
 Well may he cry, " can this be real—this !
 " So sudd'n a leap from misery to bliss ?
 " Oh ! generous Khobad !—may thine age be bless'd,
 " And heav'n's fair garden be thy place of rest"—
 Gladd'ning as sunrise to some gloomy tract,
 Bright as the valley's bounding cataract,

Exults the joyous youth's disburden'd soul,
Almost too wild for caution to control.
'Tis with an effort, whilst he meets the guard,
And noisy loungers in the palace yard,
He hides, with careless air and light reply,
His haste to leave them, and his ecstasy.

Forth from the brazen gates he rides ;—around,
White tents stand scatter'd o'er the moonlit ground.
Past these he hurries ; now, with slacken'd rein,
He gallops westward o'er the open plain.
Now, is the pine-grove—now, his guard, in sight—
He calls the signal, 'tis return'd aright.
He sees the camel, and its burden, veil'd—
His own belov'd ! so deeply, oft bewail'd !—
Fain would he clasp her to his eager breast,
But prudence bids his transport be repress'd.
He checks his horse :—his calmness, whilst he asks
If all is ready, his emotion masks.
He stops beside his slave—he speaks—and she
As briefly answers, and as guardedly :
But oh ! her voice !—its soft, low trembling tells
With what full joy her thankful bosom swells ;
And to his heart, the glad assurance, brings,
That she hath half forgot her sufferings.

And now he bids the trusty guide proceed :
Well arm'd are all, prepar'd for sudden need :
And, aided by yon moon's propitious light,
The Fortune-favour'd pair commence their flight.

XXII.

Time onward glides :—when left they Teh'ran's domes,
The moon was waning—now, an orb she roams.
Oft has the night, and cooler hours of day
Beheld them less'ning still their homeward way.
They've left behind, the Elwund's snowy peaks :
They've mark'd, on Kurdish woods, th' autumnal streaks.
At Senna's fort-crown'd town, whose birds regale
On its rich orchards, bosom'd in the vale,
Awhile they stopp'd—to change their guards, and guide:
There Selim made his life's-belov'd his bride.
Thence, wending westward, lo ! from some kind height,
At length the Zagros mountains cheer their sight.
And soon, o'er hills successive pass'd, they come
To spots that speak to Leila's eyes of home.
Soon, she beholds her valley's ridge,—soon sees
Her father's dell—the tents—the stream—the trees ;—
Friends, parents bless her,—and the festive board
Greet the long lost one, and her welcome lord.

XXIII.

And now, 'tis lovely night :—the cloudless sky
Hangs o'er the earth its star-gemm'd canopy.
From the dark mountain-peak, the heavenly queen
Looks on the valley, and the dell's calm scene ;
Bathing in silver light its pine-crown'd rocks,
Its brushwood slopes, the tents, and peaceful flocks.

Enchanting quiet !—all around is still,
Save the soft prattling of the rock-sprung rill ;
And all, o'er which the watchful dogs preside,
Are wrapt in sleep, save Selim and his bride.
Hush'd is the wind ! not ev'n a breath to wave
The hanging flowers that fringe their-rock-hewn cave ;
Nor move its shadowing tree, beneath whose boughs,
They sit communing—careless of repose.

Oh! bless'd are they:—tis sweet to talk, on shore,
Of ocean dangers, and th' escape just o'er.
'Tis sweet to them, to tell their grief, despair,
In days when sever'd—as it seem'd—for e'er.
And now, while Selim—whose encircling arm
Pillows the head 'twould shield with life, from harm—
Lists to his Leila's tale of by-gone woes,
And her resolve to die to keep her vows,
Around his soul more exquisitely press
Th' enduring links of faithful tenderness.
And, while the pensive eyes of Leila roam
O'er this fair spot, her ne'er forgotten home—
And, vividly, she feels herself restor'd
To all she sigh'd for, and to him—th' ador'd !
The tears of speechless joy roll o'er her face,
Which now she hides in Selim's fond embrace.

Ye gladsome stars ! that o'er them slowly go,
Gaze ye upon two happier beings ? no !—

Th' horizon of their lot is calm and clear ;
Gone are the clouds of anguish, doubt, and fear :
The tempest's o'er ; misfortune's desert pass'd ;
They rest beneath the palm of peace, at last ;
And may their bliss, serenely bright, shine on
Till the brief pilgrimage of life be done !

THE END.



